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Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	01/20 NKorea worst food shortage since 1990s
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2023/01/20/North-Korea-famine-arduous-march-38-north/2161674204663/
GIST	SEOUL, Jan. 20 (UPI) -- North Korea is undergoing the worst period of food insecurity it has faced since a mass famine devastated the country almost 30 years ago, a report by U.S.-based monitoring website 38 North said.

The [report](#), published Thursday, analyzes data from sources including the U.N.'s World Food Program, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and independent news outlet Daily NK.

Citing economic mismanagement, the effects of the [COVID-19](#) pandemic and rising global food prices, the report concludes that North Korea's "net grain balance has fallen below minimum human needs."

"Food availability has likely fallen below the bare minimum with regard to human needs, and on one metric, is at its worst since the country's famine in the 1990s," the report said. 38 North is published by Washington-based think tank The Stimson Center.

Estimates vary widely, but the famine of roughly 1994-1998 -- referred to euphemistically as the "Arduous March" by North Korean leaders -- may have killed one million people, or 5% of the population at the time.

The report's data showed that the price of corn spiked higher than that of rice, the country's primary staple crop, after COVID-19 border closures in 2020, signifying serious household food shortages.

Restrictions on the domestic transport of grains during the pandemic also exacerbated the situation. In early 2021, North Korean food prices beginning to soar above global prices, a sign of supply breakdown.

"The evidence presented thus far points to a significant deterioration in living conditions and an ongoing complex humanitarian emergency with food insecurity at its core," the report said.

In April 2021, North Korean leader [Kim Jong Un called for](#) another "Arduous March" to overcome the deep economic hardships the country was facing.

However, Kim's regime has accelerated its nuclear and missile programs in recent years, diverting scarce resources to the defense budget despite worsening food insecurity.

Pyongyang fired more than 70 ballistic missiles last year, a record-setting pace, and [Kim recently called for](#) "an exponential increase" of the country's nuclear arsenal.

This week, the country's rubber-stamp parliament announced that [defense sector spending](#) would remain a top priority, accounting for 15.9% of North Korea's total budget in 2023.

The 38 North report suggests domestic economic reforms and a resolution of the nuclear issue, which would bring sanctions relief and a resumption of trade with the United States and its allies, could alleviate the crisis.

Pyongyang, however, has shown little inclination to change course despite the suffering of its citizens, even with international offers of humanitarian aid on the table.

"The diplomatic leverage conferred by the granting of aid seems to be low," the report said. "North Korea appears to be committed to its nuclear posture, and the lack of accountability allows the regime to prioritize its narrow militaristic goals to the detriment of its citizens' living standards."

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HEADLINE	01/20 China downplays Covid; 'low level'
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-says-covid-outbreak-easing-eve-travel-rush-2023-01-20/
GIST	BEIJING, Jan 20 (Reuters) - People across China crowded into trains and buses for one of its busiest days of travel in years on Friday, feeding fears of new surges in a raging COVID-19 outbreak that officials say has hit its peak.

In comments reported by state media late Thursday, Vice Premier Sun Chunlan said the virus was at a "relatively low" level, while health officials said the number of COVID patients in hospital and with critical conditions was on the decline.

But there are widespread doubts about China's official account of an outbreak that has overwhelmed hospitals and funeral homes since Beijing abandoned strict COVID controls and mass testing last month.

That policy U-turn, which followed historic protests against the government's tough anti-virus curbs, unleashed COVID on a population of 1.4 billion that had been largely shielded from the disease since it emerged in the city of Wuhan in late 2019.

Some health experts expect that more than one million people will die from the disease in China this year, with British-based health data firm Airfinity forecasting COVID fatalities could hit 36,000 a day next week.

"Recently, the overall pandemic in the country is at a relatively low level," Sun said in comments reported by the state-run Xinhua news agency.

"The number of critical patients at hospitals is decreasing steadily, though the rescue mission is still heavy."

She spoke on the eve of one of the most frenetic travel days in China since the start of the pandemic, as millions of city-dwellers travel to their hometowns for the Lunar New Year holiday that officially begins on Saturday.

More than 2 billion trips are expected to take place across China between Jan. 7 and Feb. 15, the government estimates.

'EAGER TO GO HOME'

Excited passengers laden with luggage and boxes of gifts boarded trains on Friday, heading for long-awaited family reunions.

"Everyone is eager to go home. After all, we haven't seen our families for so long," a 30-year-old surnamed Li told Reuters at Beijing's West railway station.

But for others, the holiday is a reminder of lost loved ones.

Gu Bei, a writer from Shanghai, said on the Weibo social media platform that she had been waiting nearly two weeks to have her mother cremated and that the funeral home could not tell her when the service would be scheduled.

China's internet regulator said this week it would censor any "fake information" about the spread of the virus that could cause "gloomy" sentiment during Lunar New Year festivities.

"I heard no dark and gloomy words are allowed during the new year. Then let me mourn my mother now," Gu said in her post, which did not specify her mother's cause of death.

Spending by funeral homes on items from body bags to cremation ovens has risen in many provinces, [documents show](#), one of several indications of COVID's deadly toll.

China has said nearly 60,000 people with COVID died in hospital between Dec. 8 and Jan. 12. However, that toll excludes those who died at home, and some doctors have said they are discouraged from putting COVID [on death certificates](#).

PENT-UP DEMAND

President Xi Jinping said this week that he was [concerned](#) about an influx of travellers to rural areas with weak medical systems, and that protecting the elderly - many of whom are not fully vaccinated - was a top priority.

The [World Health Organization's](#) immunisation director, Kate O'Brien, praised China on Friday for making quick progress on vaccinating older people with COVID shots and boosters since lifting anti-virus controls last month.

However, she added that some elderly people found it "difficult" to understand changes in its vaccination policy since they had previously been advised not to seek protection.

A WHO report on Thursday said China reported a large jump in COVID hospitalisations in the week through Jan. 15, to the highest since the pandemic began. Hospitalisations rose by 70% on the previous week to 63,307, according to the WHO, citing data submitted by Beijing.

But in a news conference on Thursday, health officials said the number of COVID patients reporting to hospital had peaked with more than 40% fewer people being treated with critical conditions on Jan. 17 compared with a peak on Jan. 5.

While China's reopening has been chaotic, investors are hopeful that it will help revive its \$17 trillion economy, placing bets that have lifted Chinese stocks and its yuan currency to multi-month highs.

"Markets widely anticipate a surge of pent-up demand will be unleashed from the reopening of China's economy," Nomura analysts said in a note.

They cautioned that a fall in household wealth and a surge in youth unemployment, a hangover from years of lockdowns and travel curbs, may temper the rebound.

While international flights are in short supply, Chinese tourists, a much-missed mainstay of the world's retail and travel industry, are starting to travel again.

Malls from Macau to Bangkok are aiming to [lure them](#) in with red lantern displays and special dances to mark the Year of the Rabbit - and steep discounts.

Chinese spending on travel had grown to \$255 billion in 2019, accounting for 33% of spending in the global luxury personal goods market, according to estimates from the Bain consultancy.

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HEADLINE	01/19 Atlanta protesters: Friday 'night of rage'
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/newsfront/georgia-atlanta-police/2023/01/19/id/1105130/
GIST	<p>Antifa protesters in Atlanta are calling for a "night of rage" this Friday against law enforcement officials, after a police raid of so-called "cop city" resulted in the death of an alleged armed protester.</p> <p>On Wednesday, Georgia State Patrol troopers reportedly attempted a "clearing operation" of the future site of the \$90 million Atlanta Public Safety Training Center.</p> <p>Following the incident, Michael Register, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation director, confirmed to the Atlanta media the protester's death had occurred in self-defense, once the armed individual opened fire on a trooper — "without warning."</p> <p>Officials have yet to release the name of the protester killed in the gunfire incident.</p> <p>The official GBI statement reads: "At about 9:00 a.m. on Wednesday, as law enforcement was moving through the property, officers located a man inside a tent in the woods. "Officers gave verbal commands to</p>

the man who did not comply and shot a Georgia State Patrol Trooper. Other law enforcement officers returned fire, hitting the man."

"Law enforcement evacuated the Trooper to a safe area. The man died on the scene," the statement continued. "The injured Georgia State Patrol Trooper was taken to a local hospital and underwent surgery."

"A handgun and shell casings were located at the scene. The GBI is working the officer-involved shooting and the investigation is still active and ongoing," the statement concluded.

According to reports, four other protesters were arrested at the scene and charged with domestic terrorism and aggravated assault on a public safety officer at DeKalb County Jail.

Antifa officials are disputing the GBI's account from Wednesday's deadly incident. And for Friday's "night of rage," they're threatening "reciprocal violence" against law enforcement.

In a statement posted on social media, the "Scenes from the Atlanta Forest" account reads: "A call for retaliation. Consider this a call for reciprocal violence to be done to the police and their allies. On Friday, January 20th, wherever you are, you are invited to participate in a night of rage in order to honor the memory of our fallen comrade."

Also, the forest defenders claim their fellow protester was "murdered" by police.

The injured state trooper has not been identified.

Georgia GOP Gov. Brian Kemp released a statement praising law enforcement's actions, while also "praying" for the recovery of the injured officer.

"Marty, the girls, and I are praying for this brave Trooper and public safety officers across all law enforcement agencies today," said Kemp. "As our thoughts remain with him and his family, our resolve also remains steadfast and strong to see criminals brought to justice."

Last month, in the same area of Atlanta, police reportedly [arrested five antifa personnel](#) on domestic terrorism charges.

According to one report describing the December incident, "police found a cache of explosives. Leading up to the raid, militants tried to burn a man to death in a car."

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HEADLINE	01/19 Coast Guard tracks Russia 'spy' ship
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/newsfront/coast-guard-russia-ship/2023/01/19/id/1105124/
GIST	<p>A suspected Russian spy ship traveling near Hawaii has been tracked for the past several weeks, the U.S. Coast Guard said in a recent press release.</p> <p>"In recent weeks, the U.S. Coast Guard has continued to monitor a Russian vessel, believed to be an intelligence gathering ship, off the coast of the Hawaiian Islands," the announcement read.</p> <p>"While foreign military vessels may transit freely through the U.S. economic exclusive zone (EEZ), as per customary international laws, foreign-flagged military vessels have often been observed operating and loitering within Coast Guard District Fourteen's area of response."</p> <p>Cmdr. Dave Milne, the Coast Guard's chief of External Affairs, said in a statement: "The U.S. Coast Guard is currently monitoring the Russian vessel operating in the vicinity of Hawaii. As part of our daily operations, we track all vessels in the Pacific area through surface and air assets and joint agency capabilities."</p>

	<p>Milne added: "The Coast Guard operates in accordance with international laws of the sea to ensure all nations can do the same without fear or contest. This is especially critical to secure freedom of movement and navigation throughout the Blue Pacific."</p> <p>On Wednesday, the Coast Guard released a video clip of the ship, noting that it's "believed to be an intelligence gathering ship," as it traveled off the coast of Hawaii earlier this month.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 Activists decry shooting death GA protester
SOURCE	https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/cop-city-shooting-activists-question-law-enforcement-account-1234664367/
GIST	<p>ON WEDNESDAY MORNING, law enforcement officers in Georgia shot and killed a protester in a densely wooded area of Atlanta's South River Forest, which has been the site of ongoing protests against the development of a \$90 million police training center, dubbed "Cop City," for well over a year.</p> <p>The protests in Atlanta have been tense for months. They began in November 2021, when activists set up camp in what they refer to as the Weelaunee Forest, where the city council had recently approved the construction of the 85-acre facility. When I visited in late July of last year while reporting for <i>Rolling Stone</i>, the activists had set up a flourishing, semi-autonomous community under the banner of Defend the Atlanta Forest (DAF). The forest camp had common infrastructure like kitchens, latrines, and public spaces, and often hosted live music festivals, teach-ins on indigenous history, and tours for school groups and families. But the activists also regularly faced off with law enforcement and construction workers, often working in conjunction to force out the DAF.</p> <p>In December, law enforcement's attempts to clear the protest movement from the forest intensified. In one raid, six protesters were arrested and charged with domestic terrorism. Activists say Wednesday's raid was similar: a large-scale sweep of the forest involving SWAT teams and several agencies. The violence started almost immediately.</p> <p>Michael Register, the director of the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, told reporters on Wednesday that a protester had been killed by police around 9:00 a.m. during an exchange of gunfire that began when a Georgia State Trooper was shot "without warning." A GBI press release states that during an "operation to identify people who are trespassing and committing other crimes on the property," law enforcement officers were fired upon as they approached an individual in a tent who was not complying with verbal instructions. The release claims that "a handgun and shell casings were located at the scene." Photos of the scene released by GBI show a small hammock hanging between two trees underneath a tarp.</p> <p>DAF activists were instantly critical of the GBI's account, claiming there was "reason to believe" the officer was hit by friendly fire, not shot by the protester, pointing to reports by other forest defenders who heard one burst of gunshots not consistent with an exchange of fire. The Atlanta Solidarity Fund, a nonprofit organization that provides arrested activists with bail money, jail support, and access to legal representation, wrote in a statement that it was "preparing a legal team to investigate and pursue a wrongful death suit."</p> <p>"Georgia State Police has not released body camera footage or meaningful details, and we are concerned a police cover-up could be underway," the Atlanta Solidarity Fund wrote.</p> <p>"We know that Georgia Police regularly and consistently lie about the conditions under which they shoot and kill people, and that the 'facts' will frequently change to justify police action, no matter how murderous or egregious," DAF said in a Twitter DM. "No matter what they do, police will always claim to be the actual victims."</p>

The GBI arrested seven protesters in the raid on Wednesday, all of whom are being charged with criminal trespassing and domestic terrorism. When reached for comment about the shooting, the GBI referred *Rolling Stone* to [its prior statement](#).

On Thursday morning, the Atlanta Community Press Collective, a local group that covers autonomous movements, identified the killed protester as [Manuel Teran](#), 26. Several sources confirmed Teran's identity to *Rolling Stone*, noting that in the forest, Teran used non-binary pronouns and went by the name "Tortuguita," or Little Turtle, a nod to their Venezuelan and Black heritage. (DAF protesters often identify themselves with "forest names," flexible nicknames or monikers that allow them to shield their real-world identities.)

Friends described Teran as a loving comrade who was a big help in building ties between local Atlanta activists and full-time forest defenders, who often rely on local networks for support. Teran also participated in tree-sitting — spending long periods of time ensconced 15 or more feet in the forest canopy — and helped out around the camp's kitchen. They joined the protests in May 2022 from Tallahassee, Florida, where friends say they worked on low-income housing construction projects.

Teran's death has devastated activists in the DAF movement, many of whom knew them personally, and reignited tension that erupted after the Atlanta Police Department's [killing of Rayshard Brooks](#) in 2020. Brooks, 27, was shot and killed during a DUI arrest in Southeast Atlanta.

"I was born and raised in Atlanta, and I lived in Lakewood when Rayshard Brooks was killed," says a DAF protester who goes by Bunny. "For Tortuguita to be killed not even three years later just rips open healing wounds."

The DAF activists see a through-line between police violence against Black communities and their movement, which sees itself as a joint project of ecological, racial, and economic liberation.

"Tortuguita was a proud and fierce anarchist," says a friend of Teran's who goes by the name Levitate the Pentagon. "The struggle for total liberation came as their first commitment in life. We must honor that commitment."

The raid lasted hours after Teran was killed, extending well into the night as [police attempted to remove at least one protester from another tree-sit](#). The protester was arrested early on Thursday morning.

Georgia Governor Brian Kemp has [come down hard on the movement's presence in the forest](#), referring to the encampment as a "criminal network" in a statement after the arrests in December. "Rest assured they will not be the last we will take down as this project moves forward," Kemp [said in his statement](#). "The only response we will give to intimidation and violence is swift and exact justice."

But activists in the movement haven't been deterred. Iris, a forest defender, says they returned to Atlanta after seeing the terrorism charges leveled against fellow activists in December.

"The exact point of the terrorism charges is to scare people away from participating, and so I would be letting them win if I let them scare me," Iris says. "I know that they're resorting to those charges because they know they're actually in the wrong."

Teran's death provoked a flurry of action across Atlanta, and several solidarity protests in cities across the country. Calls on social media have gone out for a "day of rage" on Friday, alongside a candlelight vigil and protests in downtown Atlanta on Saturday. Every activist *Rolling Stone* spoke to said they were committed to continuing the fight, despite increased police presence in the forest.

"This murder is a clear demonstration of how police violence and environmental destruction go hand in hand," Bunny says, noting that bulldozers and construction equipment moved in after the shooting to continue displacing other tree-sitters. "It feels too overwhelming and too soon to properly express our

	grief, but we know that we must keep fighting to, at the very least, ensure that this senseless murder's victim, Tortugueta, can rest in peace knowing that the forest will remain intact and beloved."
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HEADLINE	01/19 Protesters arrested in Atlanta from 8 states
SOURCE	https://www.11alive.com/article/news/local/what-is-a-domestic-terrorism-charge/85-f736f3da-27ea-4cd4-9df3-2ee300a73659
GIST	<p>ATLANTA — During a planned law enforcement operation at the future Atlanta Public Safety Training Center site, seven people were arrested by the Georgia Bureau of Investigation Wednesday. All of them face domestic terrorism and criminal trespass charges.</p> <p>Authorities arrested another seven people last month, meaning 14 people are now facing charges for occupying the area known as "Cop City." Jail records show 14 protesters who are residents from a total of eight different states, from California to New York -- and four are from Georgia. All are accused of domestic terrorism.</p> <p>Attorney Darryl Cohen explains domestic terrorism encompasses various types of charges. It's considered a felony and establishes that a person had the intent to intimidate the public or coerce the government while causing significant harm.</p> <p>"It's a very general charge to prevent people from again, putting those that are supposed to be on the property legally -- prevent them from being harassed, prevent them from being in fear of safety of their own lives," Cohen said. "It's all-encompassing."</p> <p>The attorney clarified that the charge also separates them as peaceful protesters.</p> <p>"It's OK to be a protester and stand in front -- not on the grounds. It's OK to have a sign, it's OK to say 'this is wrong, we don't like it,' he explained. "They put obstructive things in the property or on the property, trying to prevent the construction company from actually constructing what again is called 'Cop City.'"</p> <p>He furthered that construction crews were scared for their own safety and were legally allowed to be there, as were law enforcement. By compromising safety and access, the protesters could be accused of domestic terrorism.</p> <p>"They did all sorts of things that they should not have done as a peaceful protester," Cohen said, ultimately elevating misdemeanor trespassing charges to felony accusations.</p> <p>The harsher charge could bring more drastic consequences. Anytime anyone is charged with a felony, they are liable for incarceration. In the case of domestic terrorism, this could mean a year of prison time or longer, according to the attorney.</p> <p>"It doesn't mean they have to be in prison -- but they can be," Cohen said.</p> <p>He said they will likely qualify for a bond.</p> <p>Cohen added that just because authorities filed those charges does not mean they will necessarily be prosecuted under that crime -- it will be up to the district attorney.</p> <p>"It's just a beginning of a long road," Cohen said.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 'Extraordinary' steps to avoid debt ceiling
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2023/01/19/debt-ceiling-default/

The Biden administration began “extraordinary measures” Thursday to prevent the federal government from breaching its debt limit and hurtling toward default, a grim scenario with the potential to destabilize markets and devastate the economy.

Treasury Secretary Janet L. Yellen told lawmakers that officials will alter certain federal investments to preserve the nation’s credit until summer — largely through technical moves that will buy lawmakers time to pass legislation that raises or suspends the amount the government is allowed to borrow, currently capped at \$31.4 trillion.

“I respectfully urge Congress to act promptly to protect the full faith and credit of the United States,” [Yellen wrote to House Speaker Kevin McCarthy](#) (R-Calif.) on Thursday.

Newly emboldened House Republicans are trying to leverage the standoff to extract major spending cuts, insisting that previous Congresses and administrations have spent too much on social programs. Some GOP lawmakers have even raised the prospect of seeking changes to entitlement programs, including Social Security and Medicare. But the White House has said it will not negotiate on the debt ceiling, and President Biden has pledged to oppose any attempt to cut entitlements.

On Wednesday, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said the issue should not be used as a “political football.”

“In the past there has been bipartisan cooperation to address the debt ceiling,” she said, “and that’s how it should be.”

Yellen has said a default could cause “irreparable harm to the U.S. economy.” Federally backed debt is the backbone of domestic and global markets. A failure to make good on U.S. borrowing could set off panic on Wall Street and spark millions of job losses.

In an analysts’ note Thursday, credit rating agency Moody’s said it expected debt limit negotiations to be “protracted, but debt-service obligations will be met.”

“In our view, a debt limit impasse will likely be resolved before a missed interest payment occurs because of public, political and financial market pressures on Congress reflecting concerns about the potentially severe consequences that a missed payment could have on financial markets and the economy,” the firm wrote.

It predicted that even if Congress and the White House did not reach an agreement, the Treasury Department would prioritize debt service payments ahead of social spending.

The United States has never defaulted on its debt. But it has repeatedly come close, particularly in 2011, amid the rise of the conservative tea party movement in the House. Those Republicans’ clashes with President Barack Obama resulted in months of political brinkmanship, generated panic globally and yielded a decade of significant caps on domestic spending that Democrats have long decried as damaging.

Under Biden, congressional Republicans have tried to hold up efforts to address the debt ceiling, prompting an array of experts to emphasize the costs of a potential failure. In one [September 2021 standoff](#), Mark Zandi, the chief economist at Moody’s Analytics, said a prolonged crisis could have catalyzed a full-scale recession in the United States, wiping out billions of dollars in economic growth and eliminating as many as 6 million jobs.

House Republicans have begun planning a set of instructions for the Treasury Department if lawmakers and Biden cannot reach a debt ceiling agreement, The Washington Post reported last week. That plan was part of an agreement that helped McCarthy secure votes from the hard-right House Freedom Caucus to win the speakership.

Rep. Jason T. Smith (R-Mo.), chair of the House Ways and Means Committee, on Thursday called on Biden to negotiate with GOP leaders to cut spending.

“The American people rightfully recognize that maintaining Washington’s status quo, which runs up massive deficits and adds trillions to our national debt, is unsustainable,” Smith said in a statement, adding, “Instead of attacking his political opponents, President Biden should be spending this time working with House Republicans to address the debt ceiling in a way that imposes some fiscal sanity.”

Senate Majority Leader Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.) accused House Republicans of brinkmanship that would cause “nothing less than an economic crisis.”

“This is not complicated: If the MAGA GOP stops paying our nation’s bills, Americans will be the ones to pay the price,” he said in a statement.

The debt ceiling fight puts McCarthy in a tenuous position. His caucus risks wearing the blame for a national default and the economic catastrophe that would follow. But even fringe members of the Republican conference could force the speaker’s hand: McCarthy agreed to a rules package that significantly depleted his authority and that would allow any member to force a vote that could remove him from power.

The White House has few options to act unilaterally to avoid a debt ceiling crisis. According to some legal scholars, the president could simply continue borrowing money, drawing on an obscure passage in the Constitution that says “The validity of the public debt of the United States ... shall not be questioned.” Some experts argue that clause makes it unconstitutional for the United States to default on its debt, or for Congress to establish a debt limit. But that concept would surely face a legal challenge if the White House opted for it.

Biden could also order the U.S. Mint to strike a \$1 trillion coin and deposit the token into the Federal Reserve, creating new funds to make credit payments. The White House briefly considered that idea during the 2021 debt ceiling crunch but ultimately decided against it. Yellen called the coin a “gimmick.”

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HEADLINE	01/19 Germany huge anti-coal protest ongoing
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/4ax9q3/we-spoke-to-german-anti-coal-protestors
GIST	<p>Over the past few days, the hamlet of Lützerath, located between Aachen and Düsseldorf in Western Germany, has been the stage of one of Germany’s biggest climate protests in recent history. The town stands next to a brown coal mine and has been abandoned since 2018, when German energy giant RWE planned an expansion of the mine and the demolition of the village. But over the past two years, climate activists have been squatting the hamlet and the surrounding forest to halt the works.</p> <p>The situation escalated when the police launched an operation to dismantle the camps last Wednesday. During the weekend, between 15,000 and 35,000 people showed up to protest the excavation. The police used tear gas and water cannons to disperse the crowds, accusing participants of violence.</p> <p>By Sunday, the squats had been cleared, but protests are still happening in Lützerath and in nearby cities every day. Swedish activist Greta Thunberg also joined the movement over the weekend, and was briefly detained on Tuesday after the police broke up a demonstration.</p> <p>Lützerath has become a symbol for the German environmental movement, which has a long history of opposition to coal mines. Its members feel largely abandoned by the Green party, which governs the local state of North-Rhine Westphalia together with the neoliberal FDP party, and has signed off to the RWE’s expansion. The party has justified this decision by saying it’ll allow the state to phase out coal by 2030, eight years earlier than projected. But many activists view the move as short-sighted and hypocritical.</p>

Besides, Lützerath is not just a symbol, it's also a very concrete place where carbon is about to be excavated and released [into the atmosphere](#). In an [open letter](#) addressed to the North-Rhine Westphalia government by the organisation [Scientists for Future](#), a group of experts stated that the coal under Lützerath isn't necessary to secure Germany's energy provisions over the next few years.

What's more, burning brown coal – a particularly [energy-inefficient](#) and polluting type of coal – will make it increasingly difficult for Germany to maintain its emission promises to avoid global warming of [above 1.5 degrees](#) Celsius, in contradiction with the country's commitments to the [2015 Paris agreement](#) and to EU climate directives.

The cards seem stacked against the movement in Lützerath. And yet, the protests are ongoing and people are still showing up every day. Last Saturday, I talked to some of the protesters at the demonstrations about their hopes for the future of Lützerath and of the environmental movement in Germany in general.

They only shared their first names because they didn't want their political opinions associated with their full names online.

"I've been following what's happening in Lützerath from afar in Cologne and was here last Sunday, too. I'm hopeful about the fact that there's still a lot of people coming over this Saturday. Even if everybody knows the situation is doomed, there's more and more people participating and people are still keeping up the fight.

If they actually end up excavating the coal under Lützerath and burning it, it'll be harder for me to hold on to this hope. Lützerath is not just a symbol, it's also a place that pumps CO2 in the air and contributes to the destruction of the world.

But I think there's something characteristic about the environmental movement that's described in [the book](#) 'Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet': We don't believe everything will be alright, but we stand in this crisis in solidarity with each other to maintain another version of the world. This gives me courage. But unfortunately, the crisis remains." – *Jakob, 33, history and philosophy student*

"If you give up hope, you give up your future too. That's why it's important to fight for a healthy future for our kids and grandchildren and to show up.

We are fully aware that our fight in Germany won't be enough. It must go further. But we, in Germany, can set an example. Even if the camp is being dismantled – that seems unavoidable –, people will see the protest in Lützerath. The example is still important here and we are hopeful and confident about this movement getting bigger and bigger." – *Birgid, 70, Omas for Future (Grandmas for Future)*

"I came here because I saw how many people showed up and how much is going on in Lützerath right now. I followed the situation on social media, mainly on Instagram and Telegram. This always motivates me to participate.

I'm also here because of the research, which clearly opposes the expansion of the mine in Lützerath. That's why it's absurd for me that the local government is sticking with this RWE deal. To me, the deal is a sham. Seeing so many people is very moving. That's why I'm so happy to be here.

I am not really sure whether I have hope for Lützerath itself. In my heart, I do, and I fight for it. But rationally, I think there is a 50% chance it will work.

I'm optimistic, though, and I still have hope for the climate. That's what makes us human – that we cannot give up this hope, because it drives us and bonds us together. When I think of what's happened in the past few years, I think that the diverse ways we connect through social media is good for the climate. This also gives me hope." – *Leon, 26, student and a self-employed worker at a cacao manufacturing company*

	<p>“Of course Lützerath will be excavated. Politicians signed a binding contract with RWE and got involved in this dumb deal. But to me, this is all about showing that we will not simply accept this, and making the price politics will have to pay for this as high as possible. To let them know: not like this. Not with us. You can do it, of course, but you will lose your structure, Green party. Or there will be pushback, there’ll be a devastating international echo. I don’t have hope, but I’m here to make them pay.</p> <p>Realistically, I no longer have hope for the environmental movement or for the climate in general. The planet is on fire, while politicians drive at full speed against a concrete wall, as per usual. Phasing out coal would have already been possible years ago, the Lützerath excavation is not necessary at all. It’s simply a deal with a big company, and companies only care about profits, not what happens to the world in 30, 40, 50 years.</p> <p>Nevertheless, I’m here to be part of the resistance. I’ve been part of it autonomously for the past 40 years and I don’t see why I should back down. I can’t sit at home and watch the images on TV, it’d break my heart. I find it important to show that we are the old generation, those who messed up the politics, those who didn’t manage to effectively fight back against the destruction of the environment in time. So we have to support young people – we can’t do more than that.” – <i>Joachim, 63, doctor</i></p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 National Firefighter Registry
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/emergency-preparedness/help-reduce-firefighter-cancer-join-the-national-firefighter-registry/
GIST	<p>Later this winter, you, as an active, former or retired member of the fire service — paid or volunteer — will have the opportunity to do something that can help your fellow firefighters.</p> <p>By adding your information to the National Firefighter Registry (NFR), you can help researchers better understand how your work affects the risk of getting cancer and how to lower this risk. According to National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) research, cancer is a leading cause of death among firefighters, and research suggests firefighters are at higher risk for certain types of cancers when compared to the general population.</p> <p>Some of the data requested for an NFR profile includes name, date of birth, and information about work, exposures, health and lifestyle. When cancer diagnoses are found in state cancer registries, NIOSH researchers will match NFR profiles and work histories to the state registries. They will then seek to obtain work history records from fire departments to better understand the firefighters’ exposures and how they may be related to cancer over time.</p> <p>Any cancer diagnosis information that is linked to an NFR participant is protected by the same safeguards as the other NFR data, including by an Assurance of Confidentiality.</p> <p>The more firefighters who sign up for the registry through its secure web portal, the more information researchers will have to learn about cancer in the fire service and how to protect firefighters from developing cancer in the line of duty. The registry will also help pave the way for new health and safety measures to keep firefighters safe and improve understanding of cancer risk among minority, female, volunteer and wildland firefighters.</p> <p>You can find out more about the NFR on the NIOSH NFR webpage, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How the NFR works. • Privacy and data security. • Materials to share information about the NFR with your fire service network. • How to sign up for registry updates, including when registration opens.
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HEADLINE	01/19 Clash over ‘tiny house village’ deaths
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SOURCE	https://publicola.com/2023/01/19/homelessness-authority-lihi-clashed-over-reporting-of-two-deaths-at-tiny-house-village/
GIST	<p>The King County Regional Homelessness Authority accused the Low-Income Housing Institute last year of failing to report several deaths at its “tiny house village” shelters in a timely fashion, including a homicide and an overdose that both occurred the same week in August at the Friendship Heights village in North Seattle. In response, LIHI denied that they had violated any rules, and accused the KCRHA of singling the agency out for criticism based on “falsehoods and factual errors” about its response to the two deaths.</p> <p>PubliCola obtained documents and emails about the incidents at Friendship Heights and other tiny house villages through a records request.</p> <p>None of the details about the two deaths at Friendship Heights, or an unrelated overdose death at the Interbay tiny house village in August, are in dispute. According to LIHI director Sharon Lee, a woman living at the village stabbed her partner inside the tiny house they shared on August 28, killing him and fleeing before police arrested her a few hours later.</p> <p>A Seattle Police Department spokesperson declined to comment on the incident.</p> <p>Separately, on August 29, Friendship Heights staffers discovered the body of another man who had died of an overdose in his unit at some point in the recent past; it’s unclear how recently staffers had entered his unit, although Lee says staffers are supposed to check in on residents every 72 hours. The victim went undiscovered enough, in the summer heat, that the floor had to be replaced because of decomposition.</p> <p>The two agencies’ accounts diverge over what happened next. According to KCRHA Chief Program Officer Peter Lynn, LIHI failed to report the homicide in a timely fashion, providing details only after Lynn emailed Lee the afternoon of September 1, after residents of the village began contacting KCRHA directly to find out “what was going on at the [tiny house village].”</p> <p>“Critical incidents of this nature must be reported to the RHA within 24 hours,” Lynn wrote. “We have also received information that there are ongoing unsafe conditions at the site, and therefore the program management team will visit the site to review conditions and follow up with LIHI staff and management.”</p> <p>Lee responded an hour later, saying she thought the reporting mandates had been “suspended” due to concerns from providers that they were vague and overbroad. The reporting requirements extended to lower-level incidents, such as damage to units, in addition to “significant events” like murder. “You should know that LIHI Senior Management is totally engaged on this and staff have cooperated fully with police and are working with staff and clients on these traumatic events,” Lee wrote.</p> <p>“Clearly, we reported it,” Lee told PubliCola, referring to her September 1 response to Lynn. “I know that they would like us to report major incidents within 24 hours. We have no problem with that, but it’s very clear that if here’s a major incident, we’re busy with the medical examiner, with police, and addressing trauma issues with our staff.”</p> <p>“Of course it was a shock to everybody that the man was killed and the suspect was his partner,” Lee added, but “it’s not like somebody broke into the village and killed somebody,” which might be cause for more general alarm.</p> <p>Lynn told PubliCola that the KCRHA suspended its reporting requirements for lower-level and common incidents, like damage to a unit, in response to feedback from providers that “maybe this was too much.”</p> <p>But, he added, the authority still expects to hear about critical incidents as soon as possible. “We expect folks to focus on the immediate needs at the time, but timely for us means the next day,” he said. “When there are traumatic impacts on community members, on staff, on program participants, those are all things that we want to make sure that we are able to support.”</p>

In response to the August incidents, the KCRHA issued “corrective action plan” in September that, among other stipulations, required LIHI to notify the homelessness authority within 48 hours any time a unit is “damaged or unusable”—a proposal Lee, in a heated response, called “preposterous” and “not reasonable.” The corrective plan was LIHI’s second formal reprimand since May.

Failing to comply with the requirements, the plan concluded, “may result in further actions by the KCRHA, up to and including suspension of payments, disallowed costs for the violation period and suspension of contracts or cancellation of contracts.”

Four days later, Lee sent a lengthy email to staff and board members at the authority, inquiring rhetorically whether staff at the KCRHA—whose CEO, Marc Dones, has been critical of the tiny-house model in the past—were “being directed to find fault with LIHI in order to discredit the Tiny House Village program.”

“While we have had past differences with Marc Dones over tiny houses, I was hopeful that we would be able to move forward working together. KCRHA’s most recent actions tell us otherwise,” Lee wrote.

Although the authority and LIHI appear to have reached a détente—the flurry of emails subsided in October, and Lynn said he would “not describe our relationship with LIHI as tense”—the dispute over the two deaths at Friendship Heights village is not the only point of conflict between LIHI and the KCRHA over how it runs its tiny house villages.

In the May corrective action plan, issued in response to conditions at LIHI’s True Hope (Central District) and Othello (Southeast Seattle) villages in May, KCRHA staff pointed out issues like leaking sewage, piles of bikes, and neglected propane tanks strewn at the Othello location, where a propane tank explosion had just caused a fire that damaged one of the units and took it out of.

Earlier this week, a former resident of the Plum Street tiny house village in Olympia sued LIHI, claiming they had illegally evicted him from his unit. In a conversation with PubliCola, the plaintiff, Ryan Taal, described conditions at the village where he lived for two years, including a poorly stocked outdoor kitchen and a water heater that, according to Taal, was broken for a month, leaving residents with no hot water. “It was pretty sad—it kind of felt like a refugee camp,” Taal said.

Seattle City Councilmember Andrew Lewis, a longtime advocate for tiny house villages and a member of the KCRHA’s governing board, said he was reserving judgment about the 2022 incidents and the conflict between LIHI and KCRHA. “Obviously, we need to make sure all of our providers are staying in close contact with the KCRHA, and they need to have unobstructed and uninhibited information from their providers ... but I want to see a final report on how [LIHI] met their obligations or didn’t before I comment on it,” Lewis said.

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HEADLINE	01/19 Supreme Court leaked draft investigation
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/19/us/politics/supreme-court-leak-roe.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court announced on Thursday that an internal investigation had failed to identify who leaked a draft of the opinion overturning Roe v. Wade, the 1973 decision that had established a constitutional right to abortion.</p> <p>In a 20-page report, the court’s marshal, Gail A. Curley, who oversaw the inquiry, said that investigators had conducted 126 formal interviews of 97 employees, all of whom had denied being the source of the leak. But several employees acknowledged that they had told their spouses or partners about the draft opinion and the vote count in violation of the court’s confidentiality rules, the report said.</p> <p>The investigation did not determine that any of those discussions led to a copy of the draft opinion becoming public, however. Investigators also found no forensic evidence of who may have leaked the opinion in examining the court’s “computer devices, networks, printers and available call and text logs,” the report said.</p>

The findings raised the possibility that no one will be held to account for one of the [most stunning breaches of secrecy](#) in the Supreme Court's history. The leak left the court in a state of mutual suspicion about whether a clerk or even a justice betrayed its code of silence about rulings before they are announced.

A LEAK INVESTIGATION

Read [the report](#) after the court's marshal conducted a monthslong investigation into the leak of the draft opinion overturning Roe v. Wade.

The inconclusive report comes as opinion polls have shown [weakened trust that the court](#) is motivated by the law rather than by politics, with a conservative supermajority that has steadily moved to the right in the most consequential cases.

In a statement in May shortly after Politico published the draft opinion in the case of Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization, Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. confirmed its authenticity but said it did not represent the final version. Calling the leak "a singular and egregious breach," he ordered a thorough investigation. When the court issued its decision overturning Roe v. Wade in June, the opinion was essentially unchanged.

The report said the marshal's office would investigate any new information that arose, and it made several recommendations for improving security practices. But it conveyed the distinct impression that given the select measures in place and the number of people with access to the opinion, the mystery of who leaked the opinion might never be solved.

"If a court employee disclosed the draft opinion, that person brazenly violated a system that was built fundamentally on trust with limited safeguards to regulate and constrain access to very sensitive information," the report said.

It added: "The pandemic and resulting expansion of the ability to work from home, as well as gaps in the court's security policies, created an environment where it was too easy to remove sensitive information from the building and the court's I.T. networks, increasing the risk of both deliberate and accidental disclosures of court-sensitive information."

Investigators determined that in addition to the nine justices, 82 law clerks and permanent employees of the court had access to electronic or hard copies of the draft opinion, the report said.

But in describing the scrutiny of the court, the report left ambiguous whether that included the justices themselves. The report was also silent about whether the justices' spouses had been questioned or whether their devices and communications logs had been examined.

Notably, the report said that all witnesses were initially told that they had a duty to answer questions about their conduct as employees and that they could be dismissed if they refused. But Supreme Court justices cannot simply be dismissed from their jobs.

Chief Justice Roberts also asked Michael Chertoff, a former secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, to independently assess the investigation. In a one-page statement that accompanied the report, Mr. Chertoff said that Ms. Curley's team had conducted a thorough investigation and that he could not "identify any additional useful investigative measures" they should have taken.

Asked whether Ms. Curley's investigators had interviewed the justices and their spouses, a spokeswoman for Mr. Chertoff declined to comment. She referred questions to the Supreme Court press office, which did not respond to a request for clarification.

When Chief Justice Roberts assigned Ms. Curley to oversee the investigation, some questioned whether she had the requisite expertise and resources to do so. Ms. Curley, a former national security lawyer for the

Army, supervises an office of about 260 employees who primarily provide physical security for the justices and the court building.

At the conclusion of those interviews, the report said, employees also signed affidavits “under penalty of perjury” declaring that they had not disclosed the draft opinion or information about it to anyone not employed by the court and that they had told investigators everything they knew about the breach.

Investigators had searched for signs of disgruntlement or stress, including anger at the court’s decision, Ms. Curley said. In an apparent nod to speculation that a conservative may have leaked the draft to lock in the five justices who had already tentatively voted in the majority, she also wrote that they had “carefully evaluated whether personnel may have had reason to disclose the court’s draft decision for strategic reasons.”

The leak frayed relations among the justices. Justice Clarence Thomas likened it to an infidelity. Justice Samuel A. Alito Jr., the author of the opinion, said the disclosure [endangered the lives](#) of the justices in the majority.

The report said that investigators had “especially scrutinized any contacts with anyone associated with Politico” and assessed the public speculation, including on social media, of possible suspects.

“Several law clerks were named in various posts,” the report said. “In their inquiries, the investigators found nothing to substantiate any of the social media allegations regarding the disclosure.”

During the inquiry, investigators had collected all court-issued laptops and cellphones from people who had access to the draft opinion, but found no relevant information.

Call and text logs as well as billing records from personal cellphones did not indicate anything pertinent either, the report said. While the report said that “all employees who were requested to do so voluntarily provided” such logs, it did not say how extensive those requests were.

The report cited significant technical limitations in the inquiry. For example, while investigators could examine logs of when the draft opinion was printed on networked printers, 46 printers in the building were attached only to local computers, meaning they generated no network logs. In their own local memory, those printers only saved a log of the previous 60 documents that had been printed, the report said.

But despite those limitations, the report also said that investigators did not believe that outside hackers were responsible for extracting a copy of the Dobbs opinion from the Supreme Court’s network.

“It is unlikely that the public disclosure was caused by a hack of the court’s I.T. systems,” the report said. “The court’s I.T. department did not find any indications of a hack but continues to monitor and audit the system for any indicators of compromise or intrusion into the court’s I.T. infrastructure.”

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HEADLINE	01/19 Reluctance to send tanks to Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/19/world/europe/tanks-ukraine-germany-us.html
GIST	<p>Canada is sending 200 personnel carriers. Britain will donate 600 missiles. Sweden is giving artillery systems and armored vehicles. And in one of its single largest security commitments since the start of the war, the United States said on Thursday it will ship about 100 additional fighting vehicles to help Ukraine repel Russian advances.</p> <p>But so far missing from a new weapons package that officials from NATO states will reaffirm at the Ramstein Air Base in Germany on Friday are American and German-made tanks that Ukraine’s leaders say are desperately needed — an issue that is expected to be center stage in the talks.</p>

The debate over whether either country will allow their tanks onto Ukraine's battlefields has been brewing for months. But after British officials [gave word last week](#) that they would send a platoon of Challenger 2 tanks to Ukraine, demands have amped up for Berlin and Washington to quickly follow suit.

Ben Barry, a ground warfare expert at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London, said the pressure campaign by Ukraine and its immediate neighbors in Eastern Europe harkened back to a lesson from World War II, when the United States supplied the British Army with Sherman tanks to beat back enemy forces in Europe and North Africa.

Now, Mr. Barry said, President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine is banking on a similar appeal.

"It's the same message: 'Give us the tools and we will finish the job,'" Mr. Barry said.

Here is a look at the debate over sending tanks to Ukraine.

Why are tanks so important for Ukraine?

Following pitched battles for control of territory over the last year, officials said it was clear that [tanks would be crucial in pushing back Russian forces](#). That has taken on increased importance this winter, given a limited window for Ukraine to seize an advantage before Russia deploys hundreds of thousands of newly conscripted soldiers in an anticipated spring offensive.

Ukraine's most senior military commander, Gen. Valery Zaluzhny, [has said](#) his forces need about 300 Western tanks to make a difference in battles for fiercely contested cities and towns in the eastern provinces that border Russia.

Over the last year, NATO allies in Eastern Europe supplied Ukraine with Soviet-era and Russian-made tanks that have been ground down or destroyed in constant fighting. Providing the sophisticated battle tanks — one of the most powerful symbols of war — was long seen as a red line by the United States and its closest European allies who feared Russian retaliation.

But the [debate shifted this month](#), with France, Germany and the United States announcing plans to send, for the first time, armored fighting vehicles to Ukraine to help in the grinding ground war. Days later, Britain said it would send a platoon of Challenger 2 battle tanks to Ukraine, some arriving within weeks.

That fueled pressure on other allies — namely Germany and the United States — to step up.

Why is Germany so reluctant to send tanks?

Germany has long refused to send its most potent weapons to countries in conflict, a byproduct of its legacy of starting World War II. That has included prohibiting the export of its [Leopard 2](#) tanks to Ukraine — even those that have been sold to other armies.

The reluctance also reflects a sharp division among Germans — as indicated in recent polling — over sending battle tanks to Ukraine despite widespread support for providing other weapons.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz of Germany has repeatedly said he would not "go it alone" when it comes to sending weapons into Ukraine, and would only act in concert with allies.

In practice, that has more narrowly meant that he will not act without Washington. This week, German officials said that Mr. Scholz has insisted Berlin will not send any of its own Leopard tanks unless the United States sends its M1 Abrams tanks as well.

What is not yet clear is whether Mr. Scholz would allow other nations to send their Leopards without sending any itself. Poland and Finland have already said they would donate the tanks from their own stockpiles if Berlin issues licenses to re-export them.

Experts believe there are an estimated [2,000 German-made Leopard 2 tanks](#) in use by at least 13 European militaries.

One German lawmaker familiar with the weapons delivery debate said that, so far, no European nation has formally asked Berlin to permit their Leopard tanks to be sent to Ukraine. The German lawmaker also described allies as hesitant to send the tanks unless Berlin joined them in a show of unity against Russia.

Johann Wadephul, the deputy chairman of the Christian Democrats, Germany's largest opposition party, said Mr. Scholz's resistance to sending Leopards undermined his argument of seeking solidarity. "The chancellor's refusal, and Germany's non-deliveries, are in fact 'going it alone'," he said in Parliament on Thursday.

Another lawmaker, Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmerman, head of the Defense Committee in the German Parliament, said that Mr. Scholz was likely to have offered at least some Leopards in conversations with Washington this week.

"I think he's ready to approve the export of the tanks, and to make Leopards available himself — but he wants the Americans to provide their main battle tanks as well," said Ms. Strack-Zimmerman, a member of the liberal Free Democrats, one of the three parties in the government coalition with Mr. Scholz and his Social Democrats.

She said the chancellor was wrong to insist on American tank deliveries. "There are enough tanks in Europe, and the war is on our doorstep," Ms. Strack-Zimmerman said.

Will Washington send American-made tanks to Ukraine?

That is not expected any time soon, according to two American defense officials, if ever.

On Thursday, U.S. officials said they would send about 100 additional fighting vehicles — known as Strykers and Bradleys — to Ukraine. That is on top of 50 [Bradley Fighting Vehicles](#) the United States pledged earlier this month.

A senior administration official said the new vehicles were not meant to assuage Ukraine's demands for tanks but, rather, to provide other equipment that would prove useful on the battlefield.

The Biden administration has long asserted that American-made M1 Abrams tanks — with their needs for specific fuel, frequent maintenance and spare parts, transport and training — are ill-suited to battle in eastern Ukraine, where supply lines could easily be cut off.

A Pentagon spokeswoman, Sabrina Singh, told reporters on Thursday that "it just doesn't make sense" to provide Ukraine with Abrams tanks "at this moment" because they use jet fuel and are difficult to maintain. She said the Germans must make up their own minds about the Leopard 2s.

More broadly, officials worry that American tanks would be seen as a sign of escalation by the United States — a risky step for a global superpower that is trying to avoid a broader conflict. But Max Bergmann, a former American diplomat and expert on European and Russian security at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, said Washington had already crossed that line with its shipments of precision-guided missiles and other advanced weaponry.

"This is sort of a boiling frog," Mr. Bergmann said Thursday. "They've already escalated — they've raised the escalatory roof."

American officials also insist they have not pressured Germany to allow Leopard tanks to go to Ukraine, and on Thursday, Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III praised the government in Berlin for "being a staunch defender of our allies and values."

	<p>His comments, in Berlin, came ahead of Friday’s meeting of nations that are sending weapons and other military support to Ukraine. With Germany’s new defense minister, Boris Pistorius, by his side, Mr. Austin gave no hint of whether Germany would ultimately allow the tanks to move ahead — or whether the debate would continue to stall.</p> <p>“We’ll continue to support Ukraine and their people as they resist Russian aggression and defend their sovereign territory,” Mr. Austin said.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 Biden: ‘no regrets’ not disclosing quickly
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/19/us/politics/biden-classified-documents.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — President Biden said on Thursday that he had “no regrets” that the White House did not disclose before the midterm elections that classified documents from his time as vice president were found in his private office in early November.</p> <p>After Mr. Biden toured Capitola, Calif., a beach town that has been ravaged by weeks of winter storms, the president took a question from a reporter, saying he felt that the “American people don’t quite understand” why journalists were asking about the documents and not his tour, which was focused on storm recovery.</p> <p>“As we found a handful of documents were failed, or filed, in the wrong place, we immediately turned them over to the archives and the Justice Department,” Mr. Biden said, referring to the National Archives and Records Administration. “We’re fully cooperating, looking forward to getting this resolved quickly. I think you’re going to find there’s nothing there. I have no regrets. I’m following what the lawyers have told me they want me to do. It’s exactly what we’re doing. There’s no ‘there’ there.”</p> <p>Mr. Biden and his advisers, who were at first reluctant to release information about the discovery of the documents, have faced an onslaught of questions about why the White House kept quiet about the material for so long. Mr. Biden’s lawyers discovered the first batch of classified papers on Nov. 2, six days before the midterm elections, and later found a second set in a room next to the garage in his home in Wilmington, Del., in December.</p> <p>The existence of the documents became public only last week.</p> <p>Last Thursday, Attorney General Merrick B. Garland appointed a special counsel, Robert K. Hur, to investigate how the documents were handled.</p> <p>The White House has tried to draw a clear contrast between Mr. Biden’s retention of classified documents and a case surrounding former President Donald J. Trump. Mr. Trump is under criminal investigation for taking several hundred documents with classified markings from the White House to Mar-a-Lago, his private residence in Palm Beach, Fla., and failing to fully comply with a subpoena.</p> <p>Mr. Biden’s team appears to have acted swiftly and in accordance with the law upon the discovery of the documents, immediately summoning officials with the National Archives to retrieve the files. The archives then alerted the Justice Department. Officials have described the documents found at the Penn Biden Center for Diplomacy and Global Engagement, the think tank established as Mr. Biden’s private office after leaving the vice presidency, as “a small number of documents with classified markings.”</p> <p>Mr. Biden’s remarks on Thursday closely echoed those made earlier in the week by Ian Sams, a spokesman for the White House Counsel’s Office, who assured reporters that Mr. Biden was fully cooperating with the investigation.</p> <p>“It’s important to really understand the distinction here: President Biden is committed to doing the responsible thing and acting appropriately,” Mr. Sams said on Tuesday. “His team acted promptly to disclose information to the proper authorities and is cooperating fully.”</p>

HEADLINE	01/19 Biden classified document crisis worsens?
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/19/joe-biden-casts-aside-transparency-pledge-document/
GIST	<p>President Biden pledged on his first day in office to “bring transparency and truth back to government,” but this White House has repeatedly fallen far short of that standard in dealing with his mishandling of government secrets.</p> <p>The president and his lieutenants have dodged questions, stonewalled Congress and imposed an information blackout in response to Obama-era classified documents that were discovered unsecured at various locations that Mr. Biden used.</p> <p>On Thursday, the president said he has “no regrets” about his handling of the matter.</p> <p>“We’re fully cooperating and looking forward to getting this resolved quickly,” Mr. Biden told reporters in California, where he was touring storm damage. “I think you’re going to find there’s nothing there. ... There’s no there there.”</p> <p>Mr. Biden is engulfed in the biggest political crisis of his presidency after a “small number” of classified documents were discovered in November at the Penn Biden Center for Diplomacy and Global Engagement, a Washington think tank where he kept an office after serving as vice president.</p> <p>The president’s attorneys then searched his personal residences and turned up additional classified documents at his Wilmington, Delaware, home during January and December inspections.</p> <p>The revelations have sparked several key questions that the White House has not answered. One question is why the Justice Department’s investigation was made public two months after the first document was found.</p> <p>It is also not clear why the president’s team returned to his Wilmington home this month after carrying out a search in December.</p> <p>Another question is why the White House discovered additional classified documents on Jan. 12 but waited until Saturday to inform the public.</p> <p>Questions are also swirling about what exactly is in the classified documents and why they were in Mr. Biden’s possession for roughly six years after his term as vice president.</p> <p>“Even if no one committed a crime, this is a huge national security risk, so we need to figure out what happened,” said Richard Painter, who served as chief ethics lawyer for President George W. Bush from 2005 to 2007. “If they want to give a middle finger to Congress, then they are doing the same thing they criticized the Trump administration for.”</p> <p>Federal law strictly forbids the removal or retention of classified documents or materials outside secured locations without authorization, which Mr. Biden would not have had during his tenure as vice president in the Obama White House.</p> <p>The Justice Department is also investigating former President Donald Trump’s mishandling of numerous classified documents that were kept at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida after his term ended.</p> <p>Efforts by the press and Congress to get answers from the Biden team have been stymied, and questions about why the White House wasn’t more forthcoming have been overshadowed by the main focus of the investigation: the mishandling of the documents.</p>

Until Thursday, Mr. Biden ignored reporters' questions about the Justice Department's investigation into the documents found at his home and former office. For seven straight days, he refused to address the potentially illegal mishandling of the materials.

The president had not spoken publicly about the matter since Attorney General Merrick Garland appointed Robert Hur on Jan. 12 as a special counsel to investigate the matter.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre struggles with explanations when confronted by reporters, compounding the administration's public relations headaches. She was savaged by reporters this week for not mentioning on Jan. 13 that additional sensitive materials had been found during a search a day earlier.

The White House didn't disclose the discovery until Saturday, and Ms. Jean-Pierre maintained that she didn't know about the latest materials.

Reporters have become frustrated as Ms. Jean-Pierre refers all their questions to the White House counsel, which directs questions to the Justice Department, which refers reporters back to the White House.

To deal with the public relations problem, Ian Sams of the White House counsel's office held a conference call with reporters but revealed little new information.

Meanwhile, the National Archives and Records Administration told House Republicans that it wouldn't share information for their investigation into the matter unless the Justice Department clears it.

The White House has maintained that it doesn't keep visitor logs for Mr. Biden's Wilmington residence, stymying congressional efforts to learn who had been in the house while the confidential documents were stored in the garage.

House Oversight and Accountability Committee Chairman James Comer, Kentucky Republican, who is leading Congress' investigation into the matter, called the lack of transparency "alarming."

"The White House, the National Archives and Justice Department failed to promptly inform Congress and the American people about mishandled classified documents from Joe Biden's time as vice president," he said in a statement.

Mr. Sams justified the administration's withholding of information on the investigation by saying that releasing "incomplete" information could harm the Justice Department's probe.

The Justice Department has not said publicly whether it has asked the White House not to speak about the situation.

"Every administration pledges to be the most transparent in history, but they never live up to the billing. The Biden administration is handling this worse than previous administrations because they let this situation get out of control, and now there are just too many fires to put out," said Craig Shirley, a presidential historian and Reagan biographer.

To bounce back from the growing crisis, Mr. Shirley said, Mr. Biden needs to reverse course and address the American people about the matter.

A Reuters-Ipsos poll released Thursday found that 40% of Americans approve of Mr. Biden's job performance, a sharp drop from the 44.1% who approved of his performance earlier this month.

Nearly every recent president facing a political scandal has delivered a prime-time television address explaining themselves to the American people. They include President Kennedy after the Bay of Pigs invasion and President Reagan amid the Iran-Contra affair.

Mr. Shirley also recommended replacing or bringing in someone to help Ms. Jean-Pierre in the briefing room. She has sparred with reporters and, at times, appeared visibly frustrated answering reporters' questions about the documents drama.

"The next step is political oblivion," Mr. Shirley said. "This scandal could grow bigger than Watergate because it involves national security. At this point, the only thing they can do is be transparent because when this happened in other administrations, they got defensive and sunk lower in the polls."

Mr. Painter said transparency isn't just the responsibility of the White House but also the University of Pennsylvania, which operates the think tank where the first batch of documents was found.

Questions have swirled about foreign donations to the University of Pennsylvania, some of which came rolling in after the think tank was set up.

The Ivy League school received \$54.6 million in donations from China from 2014 through June 2019, including \$23.1 million in 2016. It also received \$15.8 million in anonymous Chinese funding in 2018, after the center opened, and a single \$14.5 million donation in May of that year. Republican lawmakers say the donations could give the Chinese Communist Party sway over Biden administration policies.

A University of Pennsylvania spokesman has denied that anonymous Chinese money had flowed to the center.

"The Penn Biden Center has never solicited or received any gifts from any Chinese or other foreign entity. In fact, the university has never solicited any gifts from the center," spokesman Stephen MacCarthy told The Washington Times this week.

Mr. Painter said the White House needs to pressure Penn to release visitor logs and other information about the center.

"We need to know who has been in and out of there, including donors and the cleaning staff. All you need to do is send Chinese intel in there with the cleaning staff. It was a huge security risk," he said.

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HEADLINE	01/19 FBI reward: info on attacks pro-life centers
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/19/fbi-offers-25000-reward-info-attacks-pro-life-cent/
GIST	<p>The FBI is offering a \$25,000 reward for information on a series of attacks and threats to pro-life pregnancy centers and offices, eight months after the start of the crime spree tied to the fall of Roe v. Wade.</p> <p>The bureau announced Thursday that it would pay up to \$25,000 for information "leading to the identification, arrest, and conviction of the suspect(s) responsible for these crimes."</p> <p>"Today's announcement reflects the FBI's commitment to vigorously pursue investigations into crimes against pregnancy resource centers, faith-based organizations, and reproductive health clinics across the country," said FBI Director Christopher Wray. "We will continue to work closely with our national, state, and local law enforcement partners to hold responsible anyone who uses extremist views to justify their criminal actions."</p> <p>The bureau included 10 "seeking help" posters with photos associated with 10 attacks, nine of which occurred after the May 2 leak of the Supreme Court's draft opinion in Dobbs v. Jackson that overturned Roe.</p> <p>They include the firebombings of the CompassCare Pregnancy Services Center in Amherst, New York, on June 7; the Pregnancy Resource Center in Gresham, Oregon, on June 10, and Life Choices in Longmont, Colorado, on June 25.</p>

The perpetrators used Molotov cocktails and left behind pro-choice graffiti. At the CompassCare facility, which sustained \$250,000 in damage, the messages included “Jane was here,” a reference to the radical pro-choice group Jane’s Revenge.

At least 78 pro-life facilities have been attacked since the leak, according to the CatholicVote tracker, but the FBI has yet to announce any arrests, spurring frustration among pro-life advocates.

CatholicVote president Brian Burch said he was pleased to see the Justice Department “finally acknowledge the widespread attacks on pregnancy resource centers.” But he wanted to know why the FBI waited until now.

“Why did it take so long, and how many women were denied care because centers were forced to close, or because they were intimidated by the rampant vandalism, threats, and violence?” asked Mr. Burch.

He linked the FBI announcement to the Jan. 15 arson attack on a Planned Parenthood clinic in Peoria, Illinois, which police said was started by an unknown assailant throwing a Molotov cocktail.

“After over 300 combined attacks on Catholic churches and pregnancy resource centers, it only took a single attack on an abortion facility for the DOJ to issue a press release,” Mr. Burch said. “It certainly won’t compensate for the millions of dollars in damage and widespread fear caused by the criminal activity that has been overtly ignored.”

Those with information on the attacks were asked to call 1-800-CALL-FBI (1-800-225-5324); contact their local FBI office, or submit a tip online at tips.fbi.gov. Tipsters may remain anonymous.

“The FBI can investigate the incidents as potential acts of domestic violent extremism, Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act (FACE Act) violations, or violent crime matters, depending on the facts of each case,” said the bureau.

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HEADLINE	01/20 Peru: protesters battle police in Lima
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/20/peru-protests-running-battles-police-lima-thousands-march
GIST	<p>A march billed as the “takeover of Lima” escalated into running battles between protesters and riot police amid stone-throwing and swirls of teargas on Thursday evening in Peru’s capital.</p> <p>Thousands of protesters from across the country poured into Lima earlier in the week to take part in a massive march demanding the resignation of President Dina Boluarte after nearly six weeks of turmoil that has killed more than 50 people, including one police officer and eight people who died as a result of strikes and blockades.</p> <p>In a late-night television address, Boluarte said police had the protests under control and that those responsible for violence and vandalism would not go “unpunished”, adding “this is not a peaceful march”. She said the “government is firm and its cabinet is more united than ever”.</p> <p>Boluarte claimed that the protests had “no social agenda” but rather sought to “break the rule of law, generate chaos and disorder and seize power”. She added that attacks on three regional airports had been planned in advance and would be punished with “all the rigour of the law”.</p> <p>“To the Peruvian people, to those who want to work in peace and to those who generate acts of protest I say: I will not get tired of calling them to a good dialogue, to tell them that we work for the country,” she said.</p>

	<p>One person died and about 10 were injured in clashes with police in the southern city of Arequipa on Thursday, according to Peru's ombudsman's office, when protesters reportedly tried to invade the airport. Several airports have been closed and huge swathes of the country have been paralysed by more than 120 roadblocks.</p> <p>Outrage over the rising death toll has powered the mounting protests, which began in early December in support of ousted former president Pedro Castillo but have shifted overwhelmingly to demand Boluarte's resignation, the closure of Congress and fresh elections. Boluarte was Castillo's vice-president and replaced him after he attempted to shutter Congress and rule by decree on 7 December.</p> <p>Earlier on Thursday, thousands marched around Lima's San Martín square, many holding banners of their place of origin. Peasant security organisations known as ronderos carried traditional whips and Indigenous women wore traditional colourful skirts. There were chants of "Dina, murderer, the people repudiate you" amid banners showing Peru's first female president bathed in blood.</p> <p>"We want justice, we don't want our dead to be forgotten," Zulema Chacón told the Guardian. "We want that usurper out, she doesn't represent us."</p> <p>"They are the thieves and they lie and lie to us," said Delia Zevallos, 52, a shopkeeper, referring to the lawmakers in Congress, Peru's most despised political organ. "The people have woken up, we're not children any more, we know how to read and write ... and no one can tell us what to do."</p> <p>Boluarte, who said last week that she would not resign, met a representative of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights earlier on Thursday. Last week, the UN agency said it was "very concerned about the rising violence" in Peru.</p> <p>Both the US and UK ambassadors to Peru welcomed the meeting and issued statements on Thursday calling for calm and exhorting the government to seek dialogue.</p> <p>In a statement in Spanish on Twitter, the US ambassador, Lisa Kenna, said it was "fundamental that the forces of order respect human rights and protect the citizenry".</p> <p>In a similar statement, her UK counterpart, Gavin Cook, called for "immediate and impartial investigations, accountability measures and justice for the victims of the reports of human rights violations".</p>
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HEADLINE	01/20 Day 331 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/20/russia-ukraine-war-at-a-glance-what-we-know-on-day-331-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said his government was expecting "strong decisions" from defence leaders of Nato and other countries meeting on Friday to discuss boosting Ukraine's ability to confront Russian forces with modern battle tanks. • A group of 11 Nato countries have pledged a raft of new military aid for Ukraine, ahead of a crunch meeting on arms for Kyiv in Germany on Friday. The aid from countries including Britain, Estonia, Latvia and Poland will include tens of stinger air defence systems, S-60 anti-aircraft guns, machine guns and training, according to a statement. • The US has announced \$2.5bn in new weaponry and munitions for Ukraine. The package includes 90 Stryker armoured personnel carriers, an additional 59 Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicles, Avenger air defence systems, and large and small munitions, according to a Pentagon statement. • CIA Director William Burns recently traveled in secret to Ukraine's capital to meet President Volodymyr Zelenskiy, a US official told Reuters on Thursday. "Director Burns traveled to Kyiv, where he met with Ukrainian intelligence counterparts as well as President

Zelenskiy and reinforced our continued support for Ukraine and its defense against Russian aggression,” the US official, who declined to be identified or say when the visit took place.

- **Britain plans to [send 600 Brimstone missiles to Ukraine](#) to support the country in its fight against Russia**, defence minister Ben Wallace announced. Speaking at a meeting with other defence ministers at the Tapa army base in Estonia, Wallace outlined a previously announced package of military support for Ukraine, including sending Challenger tanks. [“We’re in it for the long haul,”](#) he said.
- **Sweden’s government [announced](#) a new package of military aid to Ukraine that will include armoured infantry fighting vehicles and the Archer artillery system**. Poland said it was sending S-60 anti-aircraft guns with 70,000 rounds of ammunition and was ready to donate a company of German-made Leopard 2 tanks, “pending (a) wider coalition” of Leopard donors.
- **Lithuania’s defence minister, Arvydas Anušauskas, has said several countries will announce sending Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine** at Friday’s meeting of defence ministers at the Ramstein airbase in Germany. The total number of armoured vehicles pledged at tomorrow’s meeting would go into hundreds, Anušauskas told Reuters.
- **Estonia’s defence minister, Hanno Pevkur, [announced](#) his country will send military equipment to Ukraine worth €113m** in its latest package of support.
- **Denmark [announced](#) it will donate 19 French-made Caesar howitzer artillery systems** to Kyiv.
- **The US and German defence ministers met on Thursday as Berlin faces pressure to allow the transfer of German-made Leopard tanks to Ukraine**. [The meeting](#) between Lloyd Austin and Boris Pistorius came as a German government source [told Reuters](#) that Berlin would allow Leopard tanks to be sent to Ukraine to help its defence against Russia if the US agreed to send its own tanks. But US officials have publicly and privately insisted that Washington has no plans to send US-made tanks to Ukraine for now, arguing that they would be too difficult for Kyiv to maintain and would require a huge logistical effort to simply run.
- **A German government spokesperson has said it has [yet to receive](#) a request from any country for permission to re-export German-made tanks to Ukraine**. Poland’s prime minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, has signalled that it could send Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine as part of a wider coalition [even without Germany’s approval](#). “Consent is of secondary importance here, we will either obtain this consent quickly, or we will do what is needed ourselves,” Morawiecki said.
- **The Kremlin has said Russia will achieve its goals in Ukraine “one way or another” and [the sooner Kyiv accepts its demands](#), the sooner the conflict will end**. The Kremlin has repeatedly said Russia is ready to halt military operations if Ukraine meets its demands, but Moscow has not publicly outlined details of its negotiating position or what it is seeking from Kyiv in order to end hostilities.
- **The head of the UN’s nuclear watchdog, Rafael Grossi, says he worries the world is becoming complacent about the dangers posed by the Russian-controlled Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant**. Grossi, speaking to reporters in Kyiv, said a nuclear accident [could happen any day](#) and reiterated the situation at the plant was very precarious.
- **Moldova has [requested air defence systems](#) from its allies with the aim of strengthening its capabilities as the war in neighbouring Ukraine continues**, its president, Maia Sandu, said. Moldova’s spy chief, Alexandru Musteata, warned last month of a “very high” risk of a new Russian offensive towards his country’s east and said Moscow still aimed to secure a land corridor through Ukraine to the breakaway Moldovan region of Transnistria.
- **A Swedish court has sentenced two brothers to prison [for spying for Russia](#) and its military intelligence service GRU for a decade**. Iranian-born Peyman Kia, 42, was sentenced to life, while his younger brother, Payam Kia, was sentenced to nine years and 10 months.

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HEADLINE	01/19 Pierce Co. ambulance service job cuts
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/south-sound-news/pierce-county-ambulance-service-announces-layoffs/OHP5FJWAJRBDR5T5TRM33CLQI/
GIST	Pierce County could soon lose an entire ambulance service to job cuts.

Scott Adams, an assistant chief with West Pierce Fire & Rescue, has raised concerns about how layoffs at American Medical Response (AMR) could impact responses to emergencies.

Adams said by the end of this month, AMR will cease operations in Pierce County.

The private ambulance company is planning to lay off 130 employees at the end of the month and Adams said it plays a key role in Pierce County.

“They have contracts with the VA hospital, Western State, and some other private care facilities,” Adams said. “So, if they pull out and they are not able to provide that service, that probably means the fire department will get calls.”

He knows that emergency responses for West Pierce Fire & Rescue will probably be impacted.

“We’re at a service, we’re on a call, and when that call comes, potentially for a cardiac arrest call, it’s possible those response times might look a little different,” he said.

Adams said AMR does a lot of transfers between medical facilities and that losing the company means that vital services will be lacking.

He doesn’t foresee WPFR doing general transfers between places like group homes and hospitals, but he knows that his service may get called for other services and that could strain their ability to respond to emergencies by adding more calls to their responsibilities.

“Some of these patients may not need emergent services and so that’s why those private ambulance companies might be a better use. You’ve got crews that are at a service trying to find a solution — find the best resources for the patients. That’s what we do. We solve problems.”

Adams estimates WPFR may respond to as many as 100 extra calls a month due to AMR’s absence. Ambulance companies across America are dealing with higher costs of gas and labor just like many other industries.

In a statement sent to KIRO 7 by a company spokesperson AMR said:

American Medical Response (AMR) officials announced that its Pierce County operation will reduce its current operating status level. The amount of reduction and subsequent permanent lay-off of existing staff is contingent upon the success of on-going discussions with current customers/partners.

Reduced demand for emergency transports, severe inflation and low government reimbursement were all factors cited for the downsizing. No other AMR operations in Washington state are included in this decision.

We are assisting employees in transferring to other positions we have open. We very much want to keep these individuals working on board Washington ambulances.

KIRO 7 stresses that this is only impacting Pierce County and Adams sees potential impacts to many fire companies across Pierce County, though the impact could vary.

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HEADLINE	01/19 WTSC: most traffic deaths since 1990
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/report-2022-saw-most-traffic-deaths-in-washington-since-1990
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - A report from the Washington Traffic Safety Commission (WTSC) found 2022 saw the most traffic deaths in the state since 1990, and more than half of them involved impaired driving.</p> <p>The agency reported initial data for 2022 this week, which showed the most deaths on Washington roads in more than 30 years. According to their findings, 745 people were killed in crashes last year.</p>

Return to Top	<p>Nationally, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration found there were 14,219 fatal crashes involving alcohol, and another 497,000 non-fatal crashes.</p> <p>"During 2017 through 2021, 32 percent of fatal crashes in Washington involved alcohol positive drivers," said WTSC Director Shelly Baldwin. "Alcohol impairment, whether alone or in combination with other drugs, continues to be a leading risk factor in traffic fatalities."</p> <p>The WTSC suggests reducing Washington's "per se" blood alcohol content (BAC) limit should be lowered from .08% to .05%.</p> <p>Currently, state lawmakers are considering Senate Bill 5002, which aims to do exactly that. WTSC says that at a BAC of .05%, a driver has reduced coordination and ability to track moving objects, difficulty steering and delayed response to emergency situations.</p> <p>"The goal of this bill is not to increase the number of DUI arrests but to remind and encourage people to avoid driving after drinking and thereby save lives. This was the outcome in Utah, and we expect a similar impact in Washington State," said Washington State Patrol Chief John Batiste.</p> <p>Traffic congestion, potholes, steep gas prices, left-hand exit ramps on freeways, and long red lights—there's so much to love about driving in Washington. According to a study by WalletHub, all those headaches make it the second-worst state in the U.S. to drive in.</p> <p>"The evidence is clear that a driver's ability to drive safely and react to unexpected traffic conditions is affected when their BAC reaches 0.05 percent," Baldwin said.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 US Stryker vehicles in \$2.5B Ukraine aid
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/01/19/world/russia-ukraine-news#the-us-announces-a-new-aid-package-for-ukraine-including-stryker-combat-vehicles
GIST	<p>The United States plans to send Ukraine 90 Stryker armored combat vehicles as part of a roughly \$2.5 billion shipment of arms and equipment that is expected to be announced at a meeting of allies in Germany on Friday, the Defense Department said on Thursday.</p> <p>The decision to send Strykers for the first time, and possibly deliver them within weeks, comes just days after Britain committed to sending Ukraine 14 Challenger battle tanks and the United States, France and Germany agreed to send dozens of armored infantry fighting vehicles, including 50 Bradley Fighting Vehicles. Germany has also been under pressure to authorize the delivery of German-made Leopard 2 battle tanks to Ukraine.</p> <p>The U.S. announcement comes weeks after the Biden administration announced a \$3 billion package of military assistance that will include Bradleys, which officials said would be especially helpful to Ukrainian units fighting Russian forces in the Donbas region of the country's east.</p> <p>Western officials fear that Ukraine has only a narrow window before an anticipated Russian springtime offensive, and have been working quickly to give Kyiv sophisticated weapons that they had earlier held out on sending because of concerns of provoking Moscow.</p> <p>On Wednesday, Colin H. Kahl, the U.S. under secretary of defense for policy, told reporters that Ukraine needed more mechanized infantry and armored personnel carriers to punch through heavily fortified Russian defenses.</p> <p>"The Russians are really digging in," he said. "They're digging in. They're digging trenches, they're putting in these dragon's teeth, laying mines."</p>

	<p>“To enable the Ukrainians to break through given Russian defenses,” he added, “the emphasis has been shifted to enabling them to combine fire and maneuver in a way that will prove to be more effective.”</p> <p>The Stryker is a medium-weight, eight-wheeled armored vehicle that can carry troops and weapons. It was first deployed by the Pentagon in Iraq after the U.S. invasion in 2003.</p> <p>The latest package for Ukraine, reported earlier by The Washington Post, would also include 59 more Bradley Fighting Vehicles; ammunition for HIMARS rocket artillery; eight Avenger air defense systems; 155-millimeter and 105-millimeter artillery rounds; other vehicles; and air defense systems, according to a statement from the Pentagon.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 Ukraine allies pledge new military aid
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/01/19/world/russia-ukraine-news#ukraine-allies-announce-new-military-aid-ahead-of-a-key-meeting-of-defense-ministers
GIST	<p>BRUSSELS — A number of countries announced new military aid packages for Ukraine on Thursday, the day before their defense ministers are to gather at Ramstein Air Base in Germany to coordinate their help for Ukraine.</p> <p>The meeting in Germany will include officials from as many as 50 countries, chaired by the U.S. Secretary of Defense, Lloyd J. Austin III, and will focus on how to provide Ukraine the weapons it needs, including advanced Western tanks, to try to push back Russian troops from occupied territory in eastern Ukraine.</p> <p>Ukraine and some of its allies have been putting pressure on Germany to supply or authorize the export to Ukraine of its advanced Leopard 2 tanks, but Berlin wants Washington in particular to be part of a collective decision to send Western tanks.</p> <p>To get a jump on the Ramstein gathering, Britain’s defense secretary, Ben Wallace, and his Estonian counterpart, Hanno Pevkur, hosted a meeting of their colleagues from the Baltics and Central Europe at an army base in Estonia to announce more military aid for Ukraine.</p> <p>Some of the donations listed in the so-called Tallinn Pledge — which was also signed by Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Denmark, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands and Slovakia — had already been announced, including Britain’s commitment to send Challenger 2 tanks. Others appeared new, including another round of Brimstone missiles from Britain and S-60 anti-aircraft guns with 70,000 pieces of ammunition from Poland.</p> <p>The countries said in a joint statement that they were committed to “collectively pursuing delivery of an unprecedented set of donations” in support of Ukraine.</p> <p>“Together we will continue supporting Ukraine to move from resisting to expelling Russian forces from Ukrainian soil,” the statement said.</p> <p>Western officials say that Ukraine has only a narrow window before an anticipated Russian springtime offensive, and they have been working to speed heavy, sophisticated weapons to Kyiv.</p> <p>In Brussels, after a meeting of top NATO defense officials known as the Military Committee, its chairman, Adm. Rob Bauer of the Netherlands, and the top American officer in Europe, Gen. Christopher G. Cavoli, said that quality tanks are important for Ukraine as part of what they called “a balance of all systems.”</p> <p>“There is not a particular weapon system that is a silver bullet,” General Cavoli said. “In the end, attack simply comes down to a balance between firepower, mobility and protection,” and tanks can play an important role in military success.</p>

	<p>The officers were careful to say that individual nations were making their own decisions about supplying Ukraine with particular weapons systems, but they made it clear that the Russians were rebuilding their own military stocks.</p> <p>“In a war like it is being fought, every type of equipment is necessary,” Admiral Bauer said. “And the Russians are fighting with tanks. So the Ukrainians need tanks as well.”</p> <p>Details of fresh weapons aid have begun to emerge ahead of the Ramstein meeting, including plans by the United States for a \$2.5 billion package that includes nearly 100 Stryker combat vehicles, and a pledge from Sweden to deliver NLAW anti-tank missiles and CV90 infantry fighting vehicles in its largest equipment package to date.</p> <p>Estonia said the package it announced on Thursday as part of the Tallinn Pledge was also its largest military aid package yet to Ukraine, including remote fire and anti-tank weapons as well as ammunition worth a total of 113 million euros, or about \$122 million. Military assistance to Ukraine will increase to 370 million euros, or slightly more than 1 percent of Estonia’s gross domestic product.</p> <p>“The free world must continue to provide arms assistance to Ukraine, and do so at much greater scale and speed,” Estonia’s prime minister, Kaja Kallas, said in a statement. “All countries must look into their stockpiles and ensure that industries are able to produce more and faster.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 CIA director secretly met Ukraine president
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/01/19/world/russia-ukraine-news#cia-burns-ukraine-zelensky
GIST	<p>William J. Burns, the C.I.A. director, traveled to Kyiv last week for secret consultations with President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine, according to two U.S. officials.</p> <p>The C.I.A. tries to keep Mr. Burns’s travels secret, and the agency never comments on the topic. But one U.S. official acknowledged Mr. Burns’s visit and said that it was meant to “reinforce our continued support for Ukraine and its defense against Russian aggression.”</p> <p>Since just before the invasion, Mr. Burns has made periodic visits to Ukraine to meet with intelligence officials and to convey information to Mr. Zelensky. A second American official said that Mr. Burns’ recent visit was an intelligence mission designed “to ensure that information continues to flow both ways.” The visit was earlier reported by The Washington Post.</p> <p>The U.S. government has periodically complained that it knows more about Russian military movements and plans than Ukraine’s. Kyiv has often been tight-lipped about its operational plans. But before Ukraine’s September counteroffensive, its officials began to share more about their intentions, allowing the U.S. to provide intelligence that helped Kyiv’s military reshape its plans to target weak points in Russian lines.</p> <p>Mr. Burns also met with senior Ukrainian intelligence officials on his recent trip, though U.S. officials would not discuss the nature of those discussions.</p> <p>Mr. Burns, a career diplomat, emerged early in the Biden administration as an emergency envoy and problem solver for the White House. And the intelligence relationship between Washington and Kyiv has been vital to the war effort.</p> <p>Ukraine is heavily dependent on insights from the C.I.A. and other intelligence agencies on Russian planning.</p> <p>Shortly before the invasion, he traveled to Ukraine to warn Mr. Zelensky and urge him to shore up defenses around Kyiv. The intelligence provided on that trip helped Ukraine fend off the initial attack by elite Russian airborne troops on Hostomel Airport, north of Kyiv.</p>

	<p>The latest visit comes at a crucial point in the war. Ukraine is pushing for more heavy Western weapons, the Russian military has changed its general in command, and the war has ground into a stalemate over the winter aside from the fighting in and around Bakhmut.</p> <p>Other high-level U.S. officials have also visited Ukraine in recent days. On Monday, a delegation including Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman; Jon Finer, the principal deputy national security adviser; and Colin H. Kahl, the under secretary of defense for policy, met with Mr. Zelensky.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 Wagner forces: Ukraine stronghold capture
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/01/19/world/russia-ukraine-news#russian-paramilitaries-claim-to-capture-a-ukrainian-stronghold-in-the-donbas-region
GIST	<p>The head of Russia's Wagner private military company has claimed that its fighters, who have used ruthless tactics to try to advance in eastern Ukraine in recent weeks, have captured the village of Klishchiivka, a Ukrainian stronghold southwest of the key city of Bakhmut.</p> <p>The Ukrainian Army said early on Thursday that it had repelled Russian attacks against Klishchiivka during the previous 24 hours, but there was no immediate comment about the claim by the Wagner group.</p> <p>The loss of the village could imperil Ukraine's ability to hold onto Bakhmut by severing supply lines to the city. Bakhmut has been a focal point of Russian attacks over the recent months as Russia continues its push to capture all of the Donbas area of eastern Ukraine. The city has also become a symbol of Ukrainian resistance.</p> <p>Klishchiivka, a small village south of Bakhmut, has been the site of intense fighting in recent weeks. Ukrainian forces had deemed it key to the defense of Bakhmut because it lies on high ground directly east of roads into the city that are heavily used by the Ukrainian military.</p> <p>"The Russians are pushing everywhere," said Mongo, a soldier fighting for Ukraine stationed in Bakhmut who asked to be identified by his military call sign.</p> <p>Russia's campaign to take Bakhmut has come at an enormous cost in casualties. But with signs that Russia has advanced to the north in Soledar — a small salt-mining town that Russia claims to have captured, though Ukraine says it is still fighting there — and the loss of Klishchiivka to the south, Ukraine's ability to keep control of Bakhmut looks increasingly shaky.</p> <p>Ukrainian officials estimate that there are more than 20,000 Russian soldiers around Bakhmut, including Wagner fighters and Russia's elite airborne units.</p> <p>From Klishchiivka, Russian artillery would be able to more accurately shell Ukrainian forces entering or exiting Bakhmut. And if Russian forces manage to cut off or begin to directly threaten some of Bakhmut's important supply routes, Ukrainian troops would probably be forced to withdraw from the city or risk encirclement.</p> <p>Yevgeny Prigozhin, the head of the Wagner company, said in an audio statement released via his catering company's press service on Wednesday that he could "safely state" that his fighters had captured Klishchiivka in full and that "fierce battles" continued around the village.</p> <p>"The enemy clings to every meter of the ground," Mr. Prigozhin said in the statement. "Despite various opinions that the Ukrainian army is running away from Artyomovsk, that is not the case," he said, using the Soviet name for Bakhmut. "In any case, Wagner units are advancing meter by meter," he added. "Artyomovsk will be captured."</p>

	A claim by Mr. Prigozhin in his statement that Klishchiivka had been captured “exclusively” by his fighters could widen a rift between his company and regular Russian troops . As the Russian army has suffered setbacks in Ukraine in recent months, Mr. Prigozhin has clashed with the country’s military leadership over its conduct of the war.
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HEADLINE	01/19 Deception Pass: 5th most beautiful US park
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/life/outdoors/deception-pass-state-park-ranked-5th-most-beautiful-us-state-park/
GIST	<p>It’s no secret we’re spoiled in Western Washington — from mountains to rainforests, marine waters to lakes, farmland to prairies, we have it all. And we know it.</p> <p>So, it’s no surprise our state parks rival some of the most popular in the country, visited for their stunning views and access to adventure.</p> <p>Deception Pass State Park, Washington’s most popular park, recently ranked the fifth most beautiful state park in the country, according to digital travel publication Travel Lens.</p> <p>To create the ranking, Travel Lens looked at search data from 2020-2022. The study also analyzed the number of state park reviews on Yelp and TripAdvisor reviews containing the words “beautiful,” “stunning,” and “breathtaking” to determine which parks are the most aesthetically pleasing to visitors.</p> <p>61.03% of online reviews for Deception Pass State Park mentioned words synonymous with beauty.</p> <p>Deception Pass State Park sits on 3,854 acres split between two islands — Fidalgo to the north and Whidbey to the south — about 90 minutes from Seattle.</p> <p>The gravity-defying Canoe Pass and Deception Pass bridges connect the two islands of the park over rugged cliffs and dark teal saltwater passages.</p> <p>Deception Pass is widely beloved for its tide pools teeming with sea creatures, long stretches of fresh and saltwater beaches, old-growth forests, abundance of wildlife and over 45 miles combined of hiking, horse, bike and ADA hiking trails.</p> <p>According to the study, Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park in Michigan ranked the country’s most beautiful state park with 88.89% of online reviews mentioning beauty. Smugglers’ Notch State Park in Vermont (76.19%) ranked second, followed by Grayson Highlands State Park in Virginia (65.52%).</p> <p>Travel Lens also ranked Deception Pass as the fourth most Instagrammed state park in the country, with 119,674 posts on the platform using park-specific hashtags.</p> <p>Niagara Falls in New York is the most Instagrammed state park in the country with 3,526,461 posts using park-specific hashtags, followed by the Valley of Fire in Nevada (285,304) and Hocking Hills in Ohio (248,287), according to Travel Lens.</p> <p>Last year marked Deception Pass’ centennial, 100 years since Washington State Parks turned the old military reserve, long the traditional land of the Samish and Swinomish tribes, into a park.</p> <p>Deception Pass has been Washington’s most popular state park ever since it opened in 1922, with visitor numbers today that rival the country’s most popular national parks.</p> <p>In 2021, the park’s estimated 3.2 million to 3.5 million visitors rivaled the attendance totals of the 10 most visited national parks.</p>

	<p>Deception Pass is an obvious escape for many nature lovers, but it's also the ancestral home of the Samish and Swinomish, for whom the park represents their treaty-guaranteed "usual and accustomed grounds" for fishing, clamming and foraging.</p> <p>The park is set to expand by 78 acres this year with a new parcel of land on the north side of the park.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 Amazon pulls out of Seattle office tower
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/amazon-pulling-out-of-downtown-seattle-office-tower-near-hq/
GIST	<p>For only the second time since Amazon came to downtown Seattle, the retailer is allowing a major office lease to expire.</p> <p>Amazon will move workers out of its offices in Port 99 on Eighth Avenue when the lease expires next April, a company spokesperson said Thursday. Amazon will move about 2,000 employees into office spaces across its Puget Sound headquarters.</p> <p>The news comes amid a wave of layoffs at the tech and e-commerce giant that will affect 18,000 workers companywide and 2,300 around Puget Sound.</p> <p>The decision to let the lease expire is not related to the layoffs, the spokesperson said. Rather it is a response to the ongoing shift to remote and hybrid work after the COVID-19 pandemic first sent many people home for work.</p> <p>Since last summer, the number of office workers present in downtown Seattle has averaged 42% of pre-pandemic levels, according to cellphone tracking data posted by the Downtown Seattle Association.</p> <p>Amazon isn't the only company rethinking its use of space in Seattle.</p> <p>Facebook plans to sublease its offices in two locations: the six-story Arbor Block 333, on Eighth Avenue North in downtown Seattle, and the 11-story Block 6 of the Spring District in Bellevue. Microsoft won't renew its lease at the 26-story City Center Plaza in Bellevue when that lease ends in June 2024.</p> <p>But some real estate observers saw Amazon's departure from Port 99 as especially significant, given the company's footprint. It's only the second major lease the company has let expire during its explosive growth over the past decade.</p> <p>In 2020, Amazon said it would let go of its lease at 2201 Westlake, where it had occupied about half of the building's 318,000 square feet of office, and would relocate about 1,000 employees.</p> <p>Amazon's larger Port 99 lease — around three-quarters of the 539,000 square-foot building — might signal a larger shift in the company's downtown real-estate strategy, said one Seattle-area real estate insider, who asked to speak anonymously to protect relationships. "This is the first domino," they said.</p> <p>Also noteworthy, the insider said: Port 99 sits just a block away from Amazon's headquarters and near its iconic spheres. "You'd have to imagine that they'd want to keep the closest [buildings] to the mother ship," the source said.</p> <p>Before the recent job cuts, Amazon had 55,000 workers in Seattle and 10,000 in Bellevue. On Wednesday, it said the layoffs would affect 1,852 people in Seattle and 448 in Bellevue.</p> <p>Earlier this year, Amazon paused construction on its Bellevue campus to experiment and reimagine the setup of its traditional work floors amid the shift to hybrid work.</p>

	<p>“Our offices are long-term investments, and we want to make sure that we design them in a way that meets our employees’ needs in the future,” John Schoettler, vice president of Global Real Estate and Facilities at Amazon, said in July.</p> <p>In March, Amazon pulled its workers from its office at 300 Pine Street, the old Macy’s building, citing crime concerns.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 Microsoft elites partied as layoffs loomed
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/stung-sting-reportedly-played-elite-microsoft-event-as-layoffs-loomed/
GIST	<p>Striking the right corporate tone for a major layoff can’t be easy.</p> <p>But Microsoft might have strayed off key this week. On the eve of Wednesday’s announcement of 10,000 layoffs, the Redmond-based tech giant hosted rock star Sting at an “intimate” event with top Microsoft execs at Davos, the swanky yearly shindig for global bigwigs in Switzerland, according to The Wall Street Journal.</p> <p>“It was an intimate gathering of 50 or so people, including the company’s top executives, who got to while away the evening listening” to Sting, a 71-year-old bleach-blond rocker and actor, the Journal reported, citing “people familiar with the event.”</p> <p>The timing, according to the Journal, was “a sour note to some [Microsoft] employees,” who would learn just hours later that the company was cutting 5% of its staff, including 878 workers in the Seattle area, as part of suite of post-pandemic cost-cutting measures.</p> <p>The cuts, CEO Satya Nadella would explain in a blog, were needed at a moment where “some parts of the world are in a recession and other parts are anticipating one.”</p> <p>The awkwardness of the Sting-then-cut timing quickly went viral, with many riffing on songs by Sting and his former band, The Police.</p> <p>“The message in a bottle was you’re fired,” read one tweet, referring to the 1979 Police hit “Message in a Bottle.”</p> <p>Other reactions were more serious. “The optics here aren’t good,” tweeted Angus Norton, self-described as a former Microsoft VP. “I’m a big fan of Satya Nadella, but this is seriously bad executive symbolism,” added Columbia University business expert Rita Gunther McGrath.</p> <p>“Doesn’t get much more Marie Antoinette than that,” concluded Steve Malloy, an attorney and Fox News contributor. “Stung.”</p> <p>To be sure, Davos events “are planned far in advance making it difficult to change them,” the Journal noted. But at least one PR expert said a company with as many years in the limelight as Microsoft might have better anticipated the backlash.</p> <p>Although “the booking of Sting to perform at Davos was probably made months ago, the decisions and discussions about cutting staff weren’t made just yesterday, either,” said Lawrence Parnell, director of the Strategic Public Relations graduate program at George Washington University.</p> <p>Microsoft did not respond to questions about the event.</p> <p>Others were happy to fill in, however.</p>

	<p>“When the world is running down, you make the best of what’s still around,” noted one online commenter, referring to the 1980 Police hit of the same name.</p> <p>But the most apt observation might have come from a German attendee at Davos: “Even in times of crisis, Davos Man doesn’t stop partying.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 Movie theater downtown Seattle closes
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/entertainment/movies/report-regal-meridian-16-movie-theater-in-downtown-seattle-to-close/
GIST	<p>A major downtown Seattle movie theater is closing its doors. Business Insider reported Thursday that the Regal Meridian 16, open since the mid-1990s at Seventh Avenue and Pike Street, will soon shut down as one of 39 Regal locations closing nationwide.</p> <p>Regal’s parent company, Cineworld, filed for bankruptcy in September. It was not immediately clear when the Meridian 16 would cease operations, but Business Insider reported Cineworld would begin rejecting the 39 theaters’ leases Feb. 15.</p> <p>A Regal Cinemas representative could not be immediately reached for comment.</p> <p>Regal’s other remaining theaters in the area, including Thornton Place in Seattle, Crossroads in Bellevue and Alderwood in Lynnwood, were not on the list of closures reported by Business Insider. Another Regal theater, Parkway Plaza in Tukwila, closed last fall.</p> <p>The cinema business has yet to recover from pandemic closures in 2020 and 2021. Last year’s North American box office was \$7.5 billion, down from more than \$11 billion in 2019, according to Variety.</p> <p>In downtown Seattle, the AMC Pacific Place 11 movie theater remains open. Nearby, in Belltown, the independently owned Cinerama closed in 2020 and has yet to reopen.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 FAA: files mistakenly deleted led to outage
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/transportation/2023/01/19/faa-notam-grounding/
GIST	<p>The Federal Aviation Administration said Thursday that contractors working on a system that notifies pilots of potential hazards “unintentionally deleted files,” leading to a nationwide grounding of planes and thousands of delays last week.</p> <p>The agency said it was continuing to investigate and had updated Congress on the latest findings as lawmakers demand answers about the cause of the outage.</p> <p>The system distributes bulletins called Notices to Air Missions and is a patchwork of new technology and components that are three decades old. In its statement Thursday, the FAA said the contract workers were trying to correct synchronization between a live database and a backup system when the problem began.</p> <p>The system started to fail on the afternoon of Jan. 10, and efforts to restore it faltered into the evening. In the early hours of Jan. 11, the agency decided to reset the system and order a nationwide halt to air travel — the first of its kind since 9/11. Air traffic soon began moving again, but delays continued throughout the day.</p> <p>The FAA said its preliminary review found no evidence of a cyberattack or malicious intent.</p> <p>The outage highlighted the aging computer systems that aviation safety relies upon. It remains unclear how the blunder could bring down the entire notification system, but the FAA said it has fixed the system and taken steps to ensure it is more resilient.</p>

“The agency is acting quickly to adopt any other lessons learned in our efforts to ensure the continuing robustness of the nation’s air traffic control system,” the FAA said.

The outage came after Southwest Airlines had thousands of flight cancellations in December, a problem it blamed on outdated technology.

The two incidents have heightened scrutiny on the aviation system in Congress as lawmakers prepare to craft a multiyear funding package for the FAA.

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HEADLINE	01/19 Proud Boys, Oath Keepers Jan 5 th meeting
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/19/us/proud-boys-oath-keepers-meeting.html
GIST	<p>It has always been one of the most intriguing stories surrounding the storming of the Capitol: On the evening of Jan. 5, 2021 — a day before the building was attacked — the leaders of the two far-right groups that ultimately played a central role in the assault came face to face in an underground parking garage on Capitol Hill.</p> <p>The mysterious meeting brought together Enrique Tarrio, the chair of the Proud Boys, and Stewart Rhodes, the leader of the Oath Keepers militia. Now part of Capitol riot lore, it has been described alternately as proof of a conspiracy between the organizations and as an innocuous encounter by two like-minded men who were both in Washington that day to support former President Donald Trump.</p> <p>On Thursday, prosecutors overseeing the seditious conspiracy trial of Tarrio and four other members of the Proud Boys revealed new details about the meeting that only served to make it more tantalizing — and elusive.</p> <p>Without the jury present, the prosecutors told Judge Timothy Kelly, who is presiding at the trial, that a video of the get-together taken by a documentary filmmaker included a portion in which someone could be heard saying aloud, “It’s inevitable. It’s going to happen. We just have to do it strong, fast, together.”</p> <p>The revelation of the exchange came as the filmmaker who took the footage, Nick Quested, appeared as a witness at the trial in the U.S. District Court in Washington. Quested testified that he had followed Tarrio and the Proud Boys with his cameras from mid-December 2020 until shortly after Jan. 6 as part of a project exploring “divisions in America.”</p> <p>Lawyers for Tarrio and his co-defendants — Joseph Biggs, Ethan Nordean, Zachary Rehl and Dominic Pezzola — immediately challenged the admissibility of the video clip, saying it would prejudice the jury against their clients.</p> <p>The government ultimately decided not to play the video for the jury. But the description of it offered by prosecutors raised more questions about what had happened during the encounter and what importance it had to the violence that unfolded at the Capitol the next day.</p> <p>It was not clear, for instance, who among those at the meeting had expressed the idea of acting together — or who was meant to do so. Nor was it at all certain what was “inevitable” and “going to happen.”</p> <p>Prosecutors never asked Quested for his opinion about the exchange.</p> <p>The video of the meeting was first made public in 2021 after Quested, who is British, released a portion of it to a British news channel.</p> <p>Later subpoenaed by federal prosecutors, the video showed Rhodes and Tarrio in the underground garage with a small group of others — among them, Kellye SoRelle, a lawyer for the Oath Keepers, who is facing separate criminal charges; Bianca Gracia, the leader of a group called Latinos for Trump;</p>

Joshua Macias, who helped run a group called Vets for Trump; and men who appeared to be bodyguards.

For reasons that remain unclear, the video was not played for the jury at the trial of Rhodes and four other Oath Keepers that took place in the same federal courthouse late last year. Rhodes and one of his lieutenants, Kelly Meggs, were convicted of seditious conspiracy in November.

In his turn on the witness stand, Quesada said that he had initially been drawn to the Proud Boys after Trump told them to “stand back and stand by” during a presidential debate with Joe Biden in September 2020. A few months later, Quesada accompanied the group to Washington in advance of a pro-Trump rally Dec. 12 and filmed Tarrío giving a speech on the National Mall a day before the demonstration.

Describing the speech as a “pep rally” of sorts, Quesada recalled how Tarrío “was very candid in his desire to resist the stolen election.”

““If you want a war, well, you got one,”” he quoted Tarrío as saying.

After the rally Dec. 12, a group of Proud Boys, including Tarrío, removed a Black Lives Matter banner from a local church and burned it in the streets. That same night, a few members of the Proud Boys were stabbed in a scuffle with leftist counterprotesters.

When Tarrío flew back to Washington on Jan. 4 for the events of Jan. 6, he was arrested by the local police on vandalism charges related to the banner-burning and for being in possession of two high-capacity rifle magazines emblazoned with a Proud Boys symbol.

A judge released Tarrío the following day but ordered him to leave the city at once. Quesada picked him up at police headquarters in Washington and took him to the Phoenix Park Hotel, where a photographer Tarrío was romantically involved with had been staying. From there, they made their way into the underground garage, Quesada said.

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HEADLINE	01/19 Sawant no reelection; eyes new movement
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/sawant-will-not-seek-reelection-to-seattle-city-council/
GIST	<p>Kshama Sawant, an outspoken socialist on the Seattle City Council who’s made headlines for nearly 10 years by pushing renter protections and big business taxes, announced Thursday she will not seek reelection to a fourth term.</p> <p>Instead, after serving on the council for a decade, Sawant will focus on helping launch a new national labor movement called Workers Strike Back.</p> <p>“My office and Socialist Alternative have been successful in fighting for renters and the working class because we have mobilized rank and file workers,” she told The Seattle Times in an interview Thursday. “The reason I am not running for office is because we believe that work needs to be continued in and outside of Seattle.”</p> <p>For Sawant, her announcement comes as she’s getting ready to vacate the District 3 council seat when her final terms ends in December. Over the last decade, her unapologetic left-leaning agenda has made her a lightning rod on the dais while rubbing some of her colleagues the wrong way.</p> <p>At a press conference held at the New Hope Missionary Baptist Church, Sawant said she’s won election after election “not on the basis of go-along-to-get-along politics, not on the basis of wine and cheese with the Chamber of Commerce and the rest of the establishment, but by fighting back and becoming a thorn in the side of the Seattle ruling class.”</p>

Since she first took office in 2013, Sawant has aggressively pushed progressive policies with an emphasis on the working class. Early on in her political career, her championing of the \$15-an-hour minimum wage effort helped make it a reality in Seattle, delivering on one of her first campaign promises. In recent years, she persuaded others on the council to ban evictions during the school year, as well as the winter, and to include relocation assistance for tenants displaced by large rent increases.

In 2020, she relaunched a “tax Amazon” push that the corporate giant had helped repel two years earlier. The council subsequently passed a payroll tax on high salaries at big businesses.

Before the end of her term, she says she will bring rent control legislation to a vote on the council.

Sawant was also the first, loudest and most consistent voice calling to defund the Seattle Police Department in the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020, which resulted in brief consensus on the council to divest 50% from the department. Later, her council colleagues abandoned the idea before it came time to vote.

Despite disagreements, some of Sawant’s more moderate counterparts — like Mayor Bruce Harrell, who frequently opposed Sawant during their shared time on the council — still praise Sawant for her vigor, despite differing policy views.

“In all our years working together, I have never doubted [Sawant’s] advocacy – and fire – for addressing inequalities and advancing climate action,” Harrell wrote in a tweet. “I respect her commitment to uplifting the voices of workers and renters in our city.”

In 2021, an effort to recall Sawant made it to the ballot with three charges of alleged “misfeasance, malfeasance and violation of oath of office.” Among the allegations brought on by her opponents was one accusing Sawant of using city resources to support a proposed “Tax Amazon” ballot initiative, and acting out of compliance with public disclosure requirements, for which she settled with the Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission for \$3,516. Sawant admitted to this charge, but said she was unaware it was a violation.

Henry Bridger III, a District 3 resident who led the effort to recall Sawant, is glad she’s leaving the council, he said Thursday.

Bridger voted for Sawant in 2013, when she won a citywide seat by upsetting an incumbent with a campaign that called for a \$15 minimum wage to combat income inequality after the Great Recession. But he became disillusioned when the council moved to district representation, saying she “ignored what was going on in her own district,” including drugs and homelessness.

But Sawant prevailed, staving off the recall by roughly 300 votes.

She said such efforts, and subsequent harassment — like a rash of vandalism on her property in 2022 — did not contribute to her decision to leave office, and are par for the course given her influence.

“There is no universe where you can do what we have done, which is win historic victories and stand up for the working class, and not get in crosshairs of the ruling class,” Sawant said in an interview late Thursday.

“They wouldn’t be mad if I was not effective,” she added.

In fact, Sawant calls criticism from others in politics and business “a badge of honor,” and only worries that the policy conversations she has driven will fade when she leaves.

“On the one hand I fully expect big business, the chamber and establishment Democrats to feel emboldened to bring City Hall back to corporate business as usual, like they had before me,” said Sawant,

who first made her decision known in an editorial in The Stranger. “On the other hand, nothing is automatic.”

Former Councilmember Nick Licata, who served with Sawant from 2014 to 2015, and who was the progressive outlier on the council before she joined, said the job can be exhausting, so he’s not surprised that Sawant, and several other council members, are calling it quits.

Licata didn’t always appreciate Sawant’s way of blasting colleagues, but thought her activist agenda “opened doors for other council members that they hadn’t considered” and led to concrete changes that helped people.

“She was the one willing to take the biggest risks on policies, and when you have someone who leads the charge, that has an impact,” Licata said. “In many ways, she set the tone.”

Sandeep Kaushik, a political consultant to mayors with whom Sawant clashed — Ed Murray and Jenny Durkan — said the socialist’s media savvy and ability to galvanize younger voters helped her push the council and Seattle politics to the left. Sawant still “has the power to shape” some conversations at City Hall and retains a hardcore base of support in her district, which includes Capitol Hill and the Central District, home to the city’s most left-leaning electorate, Kaushik said.

But Sawant’s uncompromising style (voting every year against what she described as “business as usual” budgets) and her criticism of colleagues have over the years eroded her popularity somewhat and isolated her on the council, he said.

After leaving her seat, Sawant says she will continue to further her work in stoking Seattle’s youth and working class, and will aim to bring her influence to a national scale.

Launching in March, her new campaign, Workers Strike Back, will seek pay raises, affordable housing, union jobs and other protections for the working class.

According to its website, Workers Strike Back is being formed by Sawant and Socialist Alternative in response to a wave of “workers fighting to unionize at Amazon, Starbucks, and workplaces everywhere; the movement to defend abortion rights in the U.S.; the Enough is Enough working-class campaign in the UK; and the ongoing struggles of workers and young people to stop climate catastrophe and fight for a different kind of society.”

Asked if she would consider running for a different office down the road, Sawant said she “can’t rule it out,” but will prioritize the will of Socialist Alternative.

“Always the guiding principle will be what’s the best way of using our time and resources to fight for working people,” she said.

Sawant is now the fourth of seven incumbent council members with expiring terms to indicate they will not seek reelection. Over the last month, Councilmembers Lisa Herbold and Alex Pedersen announced they would bow out of the November election, and council President Debora Juarez has made informal comments about ending her tenure during public meetings, opening up seats in Districts 1, 4 and 5, respectively.

District 7 Councilmember Andrew Lewis announced this week that he would seek a second term, and he is so far the only incumbent to do so. Councilmembers Dan Strauss and Tammy Morales have yet to indicate whether they will seek reelection.

Sawant said Thursday that Socialist Alternative does not plan to back any specific candidate to fill the seat she is vacating, because their efforts are better spent on the new project.

	<p>Business owner and community advocate Joy Hollingsworth announced Monday that she will run for Sawant's seat.</p> <p>At one of his regular news conferences with reporters in Olympia on Thursday, Gov. Jay Inslee was asked whether he had any thoughts on Sawant's "legacy and impact."</p> <p>He answered, rather tersely: "I hope she enjoys private life."</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 Feds target growing threat wildfires in West
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/feds-send-930-million-to-curb-growing-threat-of-wildfires-in-the-west/
GIST	<p>BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) — The U.S. is directing \$930 million toward reducing wildfire dangers in 10 western states by clearing trees and underbrush from national forests, the Biden administration announced Thursday, as officials struggle to protect communities from destructive infernos being made worse by climate change.</p> <p>Under a strategy now entering its second year, the U.S. Forest Service is trying to prevent out-of-control fires that start on public lands from raging through communities. But in an interview with The Associated Press, U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack acknowledged that the shortage of workers that has been plaguing other sectors of the economy is hindering the agency's wildfire efforts.</p> <p>He warned that "draconian" budget cuts floated by some Republicans, who control the U.S. House, could also undermine the Democratic administration's plans. Its goal is to lower wildfire risks across almost 80,000 square miles (200,000 square kilometers) of public and private lands over the next decade.</p> <p>The work is projected to cost up to \$50 billion. Last year's climate and infrastructure bills combined directed about \$5 billion to the effort.</p> <p>"There's one big 'if,' " Vilsack said. "We need to have a good partner in Congress."</p> <p>He added that fires on public lands will continue to threaten the West, after burning about 115,000 square miles (297,000 square kilometers) over the past decade — an area larger than Arizona — and destroying about 80,000 houses, businesses and other structures, according to government statistics and the nonpartisan research group Headwaters Economics.</p> <p>Almost 19,000 of those structures were torched in the 2018 Camp Fire that killed 85 people in Paradise, Calif.</p> <p>"It's not a matter of whether or not these forests will burn," Vilsack said. "The crisis is upon us."</p> <p>The sites targeted for spending in 2023 cover much of Southern California, home to 25 million people; the Klamath River Basin on the Oregon-California border; San Carlos Apache Reservation lands in Arizona; and the Wasatch area of northern Utah, a tourist draw with seven ski resorts. Other sites are in Idaho, Oregon, Nevada, Washington state, Colorado, New Mexico and Montana.</p> <p>The idea is to remove many trees and other flammable material from hotspots that make up only a small portion of fire-prone areas but account for about 80% of risk to communities. Vilsack said officials will seek to restore " old-growth forest conditions " — meaning fewer but larger trees that can be resilient against fires.</p> <p>House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Bruce Westerman said he was glad to see the Biden administration taking "long-overdue action" and streamlining forest management rules. But Westerman</p>

questioned why more money will be spent this year even as new projects include fewer acres compared with last year, according to administration documents.

“The Forest Service is still recklessly spending valuable taxpayer dollars with little to no accountability,” the Arkansas Republican said in a statement.

A Vilsack aide said there were “no apples-to-apples comparisons” between costs among the landscapes, which differ in terrain, access and the state of the forest. Staffing and equipment issues also factor in, and the differences can make some areas more expensive and time-intensive, spokesperson Marissa Perry said.

“We work to treat not only the most acreage we can, but where it makes the most difference with the resources available,” she said.

Some said the administration remained overly focused on stopping fires — a near-impossible goal — with not enough money and resources going to communities and people at risk, including the elderly and people with medical conditions or disabilities.

“Given the scale of how much needs to be done, we are just skimming the surface,” said Headwaters Economics researcher Kimiko Barrett. “Risks are increasing at a scale and magnitude that we haven’t seen historically. You’re seeing entire neighborhoods devastated.”

Vilsack said the projects announced so far will help reduce wildfire risk to around 200 communities in the western U.S.

Warming temperatures have dried out the region’s landscape and driven insect outbreaks that have killed millions of trees — ideal conditions for massive wildfires.

The impacts stretch across North America, with smoke plumes at the height of wildfire season in the U.S. and Canada sometimes causing unhealthy pollution thousands of miles away on the East Coast.

Last year’s work by the Forest Service included tree thinning and controlled burns across 5,000 square miles (13,000 square kilometers) of forest nationwide, Vilsack said.

“We’re very targeted in saying, ‘Here’s where we need to go to reduce the risk,’” Forest Service Deputy Chief Chris French told the AP.

But a key piece of the administration’s strategy — intentionally setting small fires to reduce the amount of vegetation available to burn in a major blaze — already has encountered problems: The program was suspended three months last spring after a devastating wildfire sparked by the federal government near Las Vegas, New Mexico, burned across more than 500 square miles (1,295 kilometers) in the southern reaches of the Rocky Mountains.

It was the state’s largest fire on record, and several hundred homes were destroyed. Experts have said the environmental damage will linger generations.

Congress has approved nearly \$4 billion in assistance for the fire’s victims, including \$1.5 billion in the massive spending bill passed last month.

“If you’re a community, you’re going to have to worry about not just nature’s fires, but the government’s fires, too,” said Andy Stahl, executive director of the advocacy group Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics. “New Mexico taught us that.”

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SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/health/flu-activity-low-washington-state/281-a3152291-d64d-4427-8145-ff9e002898a7
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Flu activity in Washington state is now considered <u>"low,"</u> according to the Washington State Department of Health (DOH).</p> <p>Health officials have reported a steady decline in flu cases over the past few weeks. The flu positivity rate was 21% from Dec. 11-17 but was just 6% from Jan. 1-7.</p> <p>Washington's peak week for positive flu cases was from Nov. 29 - Dec. 5, according to data from the DOH. In early December 2022, health officials said flu activity was "very high" statewide.</p> <p>According to the state's latest flu report, 143 adults and four children have died in the 2022-23 flu season. That's the most flu deaths at this point in the season of the last nine flu seasons. In 2016-17 there were 73 flu deaths by January, fewer than half of the current death total in Washington state.</p> <p>State health officials said there have been 114 flu outbreaks in long-term care facilities. People over 65 years old represent 111 of the state's deaths from the flu, according to the latest report.</p> <p>The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates there have been at least 24 million illnesses, 260,000 hospitalizations and 16,000 deaths from flu across the country.</p> <p>The CDC is continuing to recommend that everyone six months and older get an annual flu vaccine as long as flu activity continues. Vaccination can help prevent infection and serious outcomes if infected with flu, the CDC said in its latest influenza report.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 Iraq: deadly stampede soccer stadium
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/deadly-stampede-iraq-wins-gulf-cup-rcna66669
GIST	<p>Iraq won the men's soccer Gulf Cup for the first time since 1988 with a 3-2 victory over Oman on Thursday, but the triumph was marred by a deadly stampede outside the Basra International Stadium.</p> <p>The disaster could also have repercussions for the country's 2026 World Cup hopes.</p> <p>As fans tried to get into the stadium hours before kickoff, there was a crush that killed at least two people and injured dozens, a health official said. Witnesses blamed the deadly incident on what they said was bad organization of the tournament.</p> <p>The deadly incident happened in the southern city of Basra as spectators gathered to attend the final match in the first international soccer tournament held in Iraq in four decades. The official Iraqi News Agency said some of the 60 people who were injured outside the Basra International Stadium were in critical condition.</p> <p>"There was no coordination. Lots of people came here but regrettably, there was no organization," said Hassan Hadi. He arrived in Basra from the southern Iraqi city of Najaf three days ago to attend the final match and was not able to enter.</p> <p>Riot police beat some spectators with clubs to push them away from the gate when the stampede erupted, he said.</p> <p>Saddam Hassan, an ambulance driver, said there were people of all ages standing by a metal fence leading to the entrance where the stampede took place. He said his ambulance took injured with "bruises and broken bones" to hospital.</p> <p>Iraq's Interior Ministry urged people without tickets for the final match to leave the area. It said the stadium was full and that all gates were closed.</p>

	<p>Iraq's new Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani, who arrived in Basra on Thursday, urged people to help authorities in order to "show the final match of 25th edition of the Gulf Cup in its most beautiful form."</p> <p>The tournament, which started Jan. 6, had several incidents, including an outbreak of commotion inside the VIP section that made a Kuwaiti prince walk away from attending the opening match. It was not clear what the commotion entailed but Kuwaiti media said it was "bad organization."</p> <p>The tournament included teams from the six Gulf Cooperation Council countries — Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates — as well as Yemen and Iraq.</p> <p>The stampede was a blow for organizers just as the bigger prize of hosting 2026 World Cup qualifiers seemed to be within reach for Iraq.</p> <p>Due to security concerns, Iraq has staged only two World Cup qualifiers since the U.S.-led invasion of 2003, against Jordan in the northern city of Erbil in 2011 and Hong Kong in Basra eight years later.</p> <p>All other competitive games involving the national team have been played in neighboring countries such as Jordan, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/20 Google Alphabet to cut 6%: 12,000 jobs
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/google-parent-alphabet-cut-12000-jobs-rcna66670
GIST	<p>Google parent Alphabet Inc. is cutting 12,000 jobs worldwide in the latest round of layoffs to hit the technology sector.</p> <p>CEO Sundar Pichai announced the cuts in a memo to Google employees that was later shared online in a company blog post.</p> <p>"This will mean saying goodbye to some incredibly talented people we worked hard to hire and have loved working with," Pichai said. "I'm deeply sorry for that. The fact that these changes will impact the lives of Googlers weighs heavily on me, and I take full responsibility for the decisions that led us here."</p> <p>The cuts represent more than 6% of the company's workforce, according to Reuters. It was not immediately clear which teams would be affected, but they are expected to affect workers in the United States and globally, according to Pichai's note.</p> <p>The cuts come amid sweeping layoffs in the technology industry, with Microsoft Corp just days ago announcing plans to lay off 10,000 workers.</p> <p>In his memo, Pichai cited a changing "economic reality" as he announced the layoffs, writing: "Over the past two years we've seen periods of dramatic growth. To match and fuel that growth, we hired for a different economic reality than the one we face today."</p> <p>While Pichai said the company was "bound to go through difficult economic cycles," he said he felt "confident about the huge opportunity in front of us thanks to the strength of our mission, the value of our products and services, and our early investments in AI."</p> <p>Pichai said workers in the U.S. would be paid during the full notification period, a minimum of 60 days.</p> <p>Workers would also be offered severance packages starting at 16 weeks salary, plus two weeks for every additional year at Google, with 2022 bonuses and remaining vacation time also expected to be paid, he said. Pichai added that workers would also be offered six months of healthcare, job placement services and immigration support if needed.</p>

	<p>"Outside the U.S., we'll support employees in line with local practices," he said.</p> <p>Pichai said a townhall for workers was being organized for Monday. "Until then, please take good care of yourselves as you absorb this difficult news," he wrote.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 Greece PM: will not go to war w/Turkey
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/greek-pm-mitsotakis-war-turkey-96534993
GIST	<p>ATHENS, Greece -- Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said Thursday he still believes it is possible to resolve his country's differences with Turkey by speaking with Turkey's president, and stressed that the two neighbors will not go to war.</p> <p>Relations between the two NATO allies and historic regional rivals have been particularly strained for nearly three years, with alarming rhetoric from Turkish officials. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has repeatedly said Turkish troops could descend on Greece "suddenly one night," and even threatened to hit Athens with ballistic missiles.</p> <p>"We will not go to war with Turkey," Mitsotakis said during a session at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Thursday. "We should be able to sit down with Turkey as reasonable adults and resolve our main difference, which is the delimitation of maritime zones in the Aegean and the eastern Mediterranean."</p> <p>Mitsotakis noted that although it was a "complicated issue because of the geography of the Aegean," Greece had managed to resolve similar disagreements with Italy and Egypt and was contemplating taking a similar dispute with Albania to the International Court of Justice in The Hague.</p> <p>"As long as you agree on the playbook, and the playbook is, you resolve your problems according to international law you don't unnecessarily provoke your neighbors, you keep channels of communication open," Mitsotakis said. "And I think also it's never helpful to ... weaponize foreign policy for domestic reasons. It's usually not a good approach because you end up poisoning your public opinion."</p> <p>Both he and Erdogan face elections in the first half of this year.</p> <p>"I don't know which government will emerge out of Turkey, but certainly I think there are ways of lowering the tension, working on issues of common interest, agreeing to disagree," the Greek prime minister said. "But even if we agree to disagree, we can do so in a civilized manner."</p> <p>He said that while there had been "very, very difficult moments" with the Turkish president, "I do not consider it impossible to find a solution with President Erdogan."</p> <p>Long at odds over a series of issues, including territorial and energy exploration rights in the Aegean Sea and eastern Mediterranean, Greece and Turkey have come to the brink of war three times in the last half century. Recent tension has centered on energy exploration rights in the eastern Mediterranean, and on the presence of Greek troops on eastern Aegean islands near the Turkish coast.</p> <p>Turkey maintains that a military presence on the islands is a direct threat and banned by international treaties. Greece counters that the treaties allow for a limited military presence, and notes that Turkey maintains a sizeable troop presence on the Turkish mainland opposite the Greek islands.</p> <p>"I ask, does anybody reasonably believe that the Greek islands are a threat to the Turkish mainland, or is it more realistic to believe that the Turkish mainland is a threat to the Greek islands?" Mitsotakis said.</p>

	He noted that Turkey invaded Cyprus in 1974 and the island has remained ethnically split ever since, with only Turkey recognizing a breakaway Turkish Cypriot state in the northern third of the island. The Turkish invasion followed a coup aimed at the island's union with Greece.
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HEADLINE	01/19 Sierra Leone new law empowers women
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/new-law-aims-increase-women-positions-power-sierra/story?id=96531021
GIST	<p>LONDON -- A new law designed to increase the number of women in positions of power in both private and public sectors came into force in Sierra Leone on Thursday.</p> <p>More than a year after the legislation was first tabled in Sierra Leone's Parliament, lawmakers voted unanimously to pass the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act in November. Now, Sierra Leonean President Julius Maada Bio has signed the bill into law, just five months before general elections.</p> <p>The Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act includes a legal requirement for all designated private and public bodies in the small West African nation to ensure at least 30% of their workforce is female. That ratio must be maintained across all levels within the organizations, with the legislation explicitly stating that 30% of leadership or decision-making roles must be set aside for women.</p> <p>The act also specifies a 30% minimum quota of women for all elective and appointive positions in Sierra Leone's government or public offices, along with the requirement that every government department has its own gender unit within its planning office. The country's current electoral rules call for one in three candidates for elected office to be female.</p> <p>Sierra Leone's president, who is running for a second and final five-year term in office, took to Twitter on Thursday after signing the "landmark" law, saying in a series of posts that "REAL CHANGE has been ushered into our great nation."</p> <p>"The Bill will also revolutionise our government's engagement with WOMEN - making them equal partners in our task to build a strong and vibrant country," Bio tweeted. "Women's rights are Human rights."</p> <p>Under the new law, employers in Sierra Leone must provide at least 14 weeks of maternity leave as well as equal pay, training and treatment for women as compared to men. Previously, female employees were generally entitled to 12 weeks of paid maternity leave.</p> <p>Moreover, employers are now legally required to prohibit discrimination on grounds of gender. For instance, the new law makes it illegal for an employer to fire a woman when she becomes pregnant, and a bank criminally liable if it fails to provide the same commercial support opportunities to women as it does for men.</p> <p>The act states that any employer who discriminates against women in violation of the 30% quota or any other aspect of employment law faces a fine of at least 50,000 new leones (about \$2,500). Meanwhile, any breach of the credit fairness rules by financial institutions is punishable by prison sentences of at least three years as well as fines.</p> <p>Sierra Leonean Minister of Gender and Children's Affairs Manty Tarawalli is responsible for designating the organizations to which the new law applies -- a status that's expected to be given to any group with more than 25 employees. Tarawalli praised the "groundbreaking" law, "which she said "will break the economic and political exclusion shackles for urban and rural women across the country."</p> <p>"Today is a historic day when Sierra Leone can rightly say it has legislation carefully designed to do away with gender inequality," Tarawalli said in a statement Thursday. "Today is an important step in the right</p>

	direction, but more steps will have to be taken before the country can say fairness has been achieved across the genders."
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HEADLINE	01/20 Japan lowers Covid-19 to flu status
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Business/wireStory/japan-lower-covid-19-flu-status-easing-rules-96556362
GIST	<p>TOKYO -- Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida on Friday announced plans to downgrade the legal status of COVID-19 to the equivalent of seasonal influenza in the spring, a move that would further relax mask wearing and other preventive measures as the country seeks to return to normalcy.</p> <p>Kishida said he has instructed experts and government officials to discuss the details on lowering COVID-19's status. A change would also remove self-isolation rules and other anti-virus requirements and allow COVID-19 patients to seek treatment at any hospital instead of only specialized facilities.</p> <p>"In order to return to our ordinary daily life in Japan while pursuing measures to adapt to living with the coronavirus, we will study concrete measures to gradually move on to a next step," Kishida said.</p> <p>In Japan, COVID-19 is currently categorized as a Class 2 disease, along with SARS and tuberculosis, and is subject to restricting movements of patients and their close contacts, while allowing central and local governments to issue emergency measures. Downgrading it to Class 5 would mean scrapping those rules.</p> <p>The planned change would mark a major turning point in Japan's COVID-19 policy toward normalizing social and economic activities.</p> <p>The move, however, comes as Japan faces widespread infections and record levels of deaths in what is considered its eighth wave of outbreak since the pandemic began three years ago.</p> <p>According to the Health Ministry, daily deaths totaled a record high of 503 last Saturday. Experts say the latest increase could be linked to worsening chronic illnesses among older patients.</p> <p>Downgrading the legal status of COVID-19 under the infectious disease law could remove ongoing hospitalization and self-isolation rules and help to free up hospital beds reserved for COVID-19 patients, Health Minister Katsunobu Kato told reporters.</p> <p>The idea is to create a system where COVID-19 can be treated as part of ordinary medical services, he said. But he cautioned: "Changing its classification doesn't mean coronavirus is gone. We still need everyone to take voluntary measures by using masks and precautions."</p> <p>Kato said mask wearing is unnecessary outdoors now and that indoor use would also be eased once the downgrade is in place.</p> <p>Kato said it will require some adjustments for people, workplaces, municipalities and hospitals, and declined to set an exact timeline, other than to say it would occur in "the spring."</p> <p>Details are still being worked out but the cost of COVID-19 treatments and vaccinations are expected to still be covered by the government for now.</p> <p>Japan last fall stopped requiring COVID-19 tests for entrants who had at least three shots — part of the country's careful easing of measures after virtually closing its borders to foreign tourists for about two years.</p> <p>Japan is now reporting known daily cases of between 100,000 and 200,000.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 Another obstacle to revival of WA ferries
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SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/transportation/submerged-log-just-another-obstacle-to-revival-of-wa-ferries/
GIST	<p>Last weekend's breakdown of the marine vessel Puyallup, apparently caused by a floating log between Edmonds and Kingston, has delayed those communities' long-awaited return to full two-boat service.</p> <p>The underwater impact, which bent the propeller, also represents a temporary bump in the road as the state restores all 10 routes to the nation's largest ferry system.</p> <p>Washington State Ferries has funded a hiring binge to reduce chronic crew shortages, ridership is rising, and the Legislature is sending more money since the depths of fall 2021, when ferry leaders announced a skimpy "alternate service" schedule.</p> <p>Ridership statewide grew by 100,000 passengers, or 0.6%, to a total 17.4 million in 2022. Vehicle traffic reached 82% of pre-pandemic, full-service levels, total riders at 73%, but walk-on passengers only 49% as many continued to work from home.</p> <p>Ironically, the Edmonds-Kingston route was undergoing "full service restoration trials" with two-boat service since Jan. 1, after months of running mainly a single ferry. If the fleet achieves 95% reliability for three weeks, the route would be considered permanently restored. "I'm happy to say, a week and a half into it, we're doing well," ferries director Patty Rubstello told an online community forum, just two days before the log strike on Friday the 13th.</p> <p>Now, the jumbo 202-car ferry will be docked seven to 10 days in Kingston, until underwater repairs are complete. The crew wasn't sure where and when the prop hit the log, but noticed excess vibration late Friday, according to spokesperson Hadley Rodero.</p> <p>More hazards await this weekend, as several days of king tides arrive in Puget Sound waters, some reaching 13 feet. Unusual volumes of timber were already awash following king tides in late December.</p> <p>Driftwood and dock pieces can be tough to spot, especially at night or during fog, rain or smoke. "Wave action also hinders a navigator's view as hazards are often low to the waterline," said Brad Schultz, chief of waterway maintenance for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Seattle District, who has been salvaging hazardous logs. Waterlogged trees, known as "deadheads," can partly sink or drift at angles where they're mostly underwater, he said. Some lines of debris exceed 1,000 yards, he said.</p> <p>WSF will soon refocus on its restoration plan, that ranks the 10 routes by priority. More deck officers are considered the greatest need, to fully staff the network, ferry managers say.</p> <p>In the wake of shift reorganizations and increased training, the prospects look good to have enough navigators by summer, said Dan Twohig, regional representative for the International Organization of Masters, Mates & Pilots.</p> <p>"The MM&P have put the people in place to make the service restoration plan successful. I think it's going to get better. It's painful, but we are turning the corner. The big wild card is the boats," Twohig said.</p> <p>The agency hired 202 fleet workers in 2022, while 42 retired and 99 resigned for other reasons, resulting in a net gain of 61 crew, Rodero said.</p> <p>The workforce remains depleted, including a shortage of nearly 30 captains and mates. Filling those positions is difficult, Rubstello said, because deckhands need at least five years or longer to earn promotion to captains.</p> <p>The Legislature and WSF now provide paid training for experienced deckhands while they study to become mates. Twelve now are doing so, another cohort of 12 begin this month, and 18 are undergoing "pilotage" training aboard ship, a December report said.</p>

The governor's 2023-25 budget proposes a \$21.5 million boost for recruiting and training, along with \$202.4 million to preserve and maintain boats.

Besides more training options, WSF now offers year-round work instead of seasonal entry-level jobs, and weeklong assignments for engine room workers, Chief of Staff Nicole McIntosh said. Those changes address years of frustration where unstable schedules discouraged people from ferry careers.

Public abuse of front-line workers, including racial and sexist slurs, and spitting, have created an obstacle to retaining crew, and WSF is trying to reduce rider misconduct, Rubstello reported.

The 21-vessel fleet, too, is stretched thin. Normally, 17 ferries run during the winter and 19 in summer, while two to four undergo planned maintenance. But three more boats — the Cathlamet, the Tacoma and now the Puyallup — are sidelined. The Cathlamet, which [crunched into pilings at the Fauntleroy dock](#) last summer, is being repaired at a shipyard.

If the Cathlamet were intact, could WSF reshuffle its fleet so Edmonds-Kingston still offers two boats this week? Rodero couldn't answer for sure, but said another boat would certainly help.

Regular riders of the Edmonds-Kingston passage have become reluctantly accustomed to reduced service. The route was fourth in line, behind the Anacortes-San Juan Islands, Seattle-Bainbridge, and Mukilteo-Clinton routes, to return to full operation. There was an hour wait to catch a boat leaving Kingston on Wednesday morning, state officials said.

Aging vessels remain a challenge. The Tilikum, Kaleetan and Yakima are due for retirement between now and 2027, but Rubstello said the Legislature provided enough money to keep them sailing, until five new hybrid-electric boats are built this decade.

WSF aspires to restore a third boat to the Fauntleroy-Vashon-Southworth triangle corridor sometime in early 2023. The Seattle-Bremerton and Port Townsend-Coupeville routes might each get a second boat if enough mates finish training by spring, says a [January progress update](#).

However, there is no prospect to reopen the international route between Anacortes and Sidney, B.C., until summer or later.

2023 will be an eventful year. The Coast Guard and WSF are expected to release their investigative reports into why the Cathlamet crashed, but neither agency gave a timeline to publish their findings.

Additionally, there's likely to be a hairy period for drivers traveling between Bainbridge Island and Seattle. The [new Colman Dock](#) in downtown Seattle is nearly complete, and final steps include a period when cars will be restricted on that route.

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HEADLINE	01/19 Calif. storms: hype not climate change?
SOURCE	https://www.latimes.com/environment/story/2023-01-19/california-storms-more-hype-than-climate-change
GIST	<p>LOS ANGELES — As California emerges from a two-week bout of deadly atmospheric rivers, a number of climate researchers say the recent storms appear to be typical of the intense, periodic rains the state has experienced throughout its history and not the result of global warming.</p> <p>Although scientists are still studying the size and severity of storms that killed 19 people and caused up to \$1 billion in damage, initial assessments suggest the destruction had more to do with California's historic drought-to-deluge cycles, mountainous topography and aging flood infrastructure than it did with climate-altering greenhouse gasses.</p> <p>Although the media and some officials were quick to link a series of powerful storms to climate change, researchers interviewed by The Times said they had yet to see evidence of that connection. Instead, the</p>

unexpected onslaught of rain and snow after three years of punishing drought appears akin to other major storms that have struck California every decade or more since experts began keeping records in the 1800s.

“We know from climate models that global warming will boost California storms of the future, but we haven’t made that connection with the latest storm systems,” said Alexander Gershunov, a climate scientist at Scripps Institution of Oceanography. “Assuming that these storms were driven by global warming would be like assuming an athlete who breaks a record was on steroids.”

Mike Anderson, official state climatologist for California, suggested that the recent series of atmospheric rivers — long plumes of vapor that can pour over the West Coast — was a grim reminder that in a place so dry, sudden flooding can bring catastrophe.

“Each of the recent atmospheric rivers were within the historical distribution of sizes of atmospheric rivers,” Anderson said, “It will take further study to determine how warming temperatures influenced the sequence or the sudden transition from dry to wet and soon back to dry.”

News and social media images of the storms were harrowing. Massive ocean waves demolished sea walls and a pier. Hurricane-force winds uprooted trees that crushed and killed bystanders. Breached levees flooded the Sacramento-San Joaquin River delta region, drowning motorists.

The parade of storms also dumped desperately needed snow on the Sierra Nevada range — nearly 250% of average for this time of year. It also recharged giant reservoirs that had dwindled to weedy channels. In one instance, Lake Cachuma, about 15 miles northwest of Santa Barbara, rose from 36% capacity to nearly 80% in just one day.

But in a region whose water supply has been severely depleted by more than two decades of megadrought stoked by climate change, researchers suggested that some observers were too quick to reach for superlatives.

“A group I call ‘mediaologists’ always hype the current situation to make it seem worse than the last one,” Gershunov said, using a pithy play on the word meteorologists.

Although scientists still can’t say yet where recent storms rank among other epic downpours, they said they did not appear to be one of a kind.

“Overall, it was nothing as big as what we’ve gone through before,” said Jayme Laber, senior hydrologist for the National Weather Service in Los Angeles.

Indeed, this midwinter’s precipitation was far behind the 1956 season, when California had received a whopping 85.3% of its average annual precipitation by Jan. 17, according to the Center for Western Weather and Water Extremes. As of Wednesday, California had accumulated about 70% of its average annual total, the center said.

Within the last century, Southern California experienced the “Great flood of 1938,” which killed more than 100 people; left thousands homeless and prompted officials to line the Los Angeles River with concrete as a means of flood control. Other intense storms have occurred in 1964, 1969, 1982, 1986, 1995, and 2005, when a school camp perched 3,600 feet above Pasadena in the Angeles National Forest recorded 107 inches of rain in one week.

More recently, a series of drought-busting atmospheric rivers that slammed into California in 2017 eroded the main and emergency spillways at Oroville Dam, forcing thousands of residents to evacuate.

That emergency, scientists say, was a taste of the kind of meteorological tumult Mother Nature has in store for the future: Climate models predict more frequent megastorms fueled by warming oceans and a thirstier atmosphere due to global warming.

“Most recent storm systems don’t hold a candle to the kinds of extreme prolonged storms of the last century,” said Daniel Swain, a climate scientist at UCLA. “They do, however, point in the direction of the episodes of hydro-climate we can expect to see more of due to global warming.”

It’s the prospect of these larger and more damaging storms that have fueled calls to upgrade the state’s flood infrastructure and spurred efforts to capture and store water for future use.

“California’s environment is changing fast beneath our feet,” Swain said. “Future generations have huge problems ahead of them.”

While this month’s storms have provided much needed drought relief to California, they will do little to erase the larger mega-drought conditions that have gripped the American West since 2000 — conditions that are fueled substantially by global warming and contributing to a growing crisis along the Colorado River.

“Rain that falls in California stays in California,” said A. Park Williams, a climate scientist at UCLA. “That’s because the moisture delivered by Pacific storms is wrung out by huge walls of mountains from the Sierra Nevadas in the north to the San Bernardinos in the south.”

Williams, who helped establish that 2000-2021 was the driest 22-year period in the southwest in 1,200 years, said the megadrought was likely to persist through 2023, matching the duration of another mega-drought in the late-1500s.

“Although these big wet interruptions of surface water quickly refill reservoirs, which is a good thing, our underground aquifers don’t rebound nearly as easily because we’ve been mining their resources at a breakneck speed for decades,” he said.

Like other climate scientists interviewed by The Times, Williams said his research “does not show a connection” between recent storms and global warming.

“Global warming is real,” he said, “and because of it the heaviest storms around the world are getting heavier — except in California and the southwestern United States, where the weather typically swings from too dry to too wet.”

The intensity of such dry-to-wet swings in the future will be amplified by drought, rising temperatures, and continuing human exploitation of natural water resources, scientists say.

The intensity of those swings will not only test California’s ability to weather harsher storms, but it will forever alter the ecological cycles of plants and animals that have evolved here over millions of years.

Indeed, while millions of Californians were wringing their hands over weather reports generated by local and national media, biologists were trying to draw attention to the effects of two decades of drought, heat waves, wildfires and debris flows.

They say a growing list of living symbols of longevity, strength, and perseverance — desert tortoises, saguaro cactuses, bristlecone pines, cottonwood forests, giant sequoias, chinook salmon, Joshua trees — may be at an evolutionary crossroads.

“California’s species have a long history of adapting to episodic drought,” said Gary Bucciarelli, a conservation biologist at UC Davis. “But never before have they struggled to survive so many different threats at one time.”

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HEADLINE	01/20 Costa Rica govt. suffers ransomware attack
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/costa-ricas-ministry-of-public-works-and-transport-crippled-by-ransomware-attack/
GIST	<p>Costa Rica's government has suffered another ransomware attack just months after several ministries were crippled in a wide-ranging attack by hackers using the Conti ransomware.</p> <p>On Tuesday, Costa Rica's Ministry of Public Works and Transport (MOPT) said in a statement that 12 of its servers were encrypted. Cybersecurity experts from the National Security Directorate and the Ministry of Science, Innovation, Technology and Telecommunications were called in to address the situation and all of MOPT's computer systems were knocked offline.</p> <p>The government did not respond to requests for comment but released a follow-up statement on Wednesday saying international organizations were brought in for support.</p> <p>Driving tests are still being conducted in person and while license issuance services were briefly disrupted, they are now being resumed.</p> <p>"Traffic Engineering and Public Works, navigation and maritime safety services, which were offered virtually, will be attended to in person until further notice," the notice says.</p> <p>The MOPT warned citizens to watch out for scammers, noting that no one is being contacted by the ministry over email or phone to process any of its services.</p> <p>Several other agencies either severed their connections to MOPT in an effort to contain the attack or said services were limited due to the attack. The ministry posted a similar message on Instagram.</p> <p>The country's judiciary said it cut off its connection to MOPT, limiting the ability of the country's traffic courts to function.</p> <p>"Until the link is enabled again, it will not be possible to download fines, tickets and other files," the court system said on Twitter on Wednesday.</p> <p>"The measure is carried out as part of the protocol for this type of incident in order to ensure the technological infrastructure of the Judiciary."</p> <p>The Road Safety Council posted its own message on Thursday, writing that their computer infrastructure is separate from MOPT and was not affected by the ransomware attack.</p> <p>Just six months ago, Costa Rica's government drew national headlines after being attacked by hackers using the Conti ransomware.</p> <p>Dozens of its government agencies — including the Ministry of Finance — had their servers encrypted in an attack that took place right as Costa Rica's new President Rodrigo Chaves was taking over. The hackers even brought down one Costa Rican town's energy supplier.</p> <p>Chaves declared a national state of emergency in May, marking the first time a national leader responded to a cyberattack the same way they might respond to a military attack or natural disaster.</p> <p>Conti hackers later doubled down: "We are determined to overthrow the government by means of a cyberattack," they said. "We have already shown you all the strength and power."</p> <p>Hackers using the Hive ransomware then attacked the country's health services — canceling schedules and erasing medical records.</p>

	<p>The Costa Rican government refused to pay the \$10 million ransom issued by Conti and brought in help from several cybersecurity companies as well as officials from the governments of the United States, Spain, and Israel.</p> <p>No ransomware group has taken credit for the latest attack.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 Latin America hacktivists Guacamaya
SOURCE	https://www.cyberscoop.com/guacamaya-hackivist-group-latin-america-interview/
GIST	<p>At a press conference in Mexico City last October, about a month after a massive leak of secret government and military documents created a domestic political firestorm, Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador attempted to downplay the ensuing controversy. He told reporters his opponents failed to use the information against him and mocked the hacktivists behind the breach, a group calling itself “Guacamaya,” the Mayan name for a macaw.</p> <p>“This macaw,” he said, with a wave of his hand and a wink, “has become a buzzard.”</p> <p>Despite the president’s attempt to dismiss the hacktivists, the little-known group came from nowhere to shake power centers across Mexico. The data dump quickly blew up on social media and dominated headlines for weeks. Some of the most politically damaging information related to how López Obrador apparently misled the public about his health, the Mexican military’s control over the civilian government and how the military hid claims of sexual abuse against women. The cache of documents also contained details about potential public collusion with cartels and the government’s use of spyware against journalists.</p> <p>Guacamaya has put Latin American governments and global corporations with a Latin American presence on notice that it wants to expose state secrets, business dealings and the intimate details of whatever else the group deems corrupt. “Anything that represents oppressive states, multinational corporations and, in short, anything that supports this system of death,” is fair game, the group told CyberScoop in an email.</p> <p>Over the course of an extended email exchange with the group’s official email address, CyberScoop sought to understand more about Guacamaya’s aims, its goals, how they carry out operations and who they are. The group preferred to respond to questions in Spanish, which CyberScoop then had translated.</p> <p>Guacamaya has released between 20 and 25 terabytes of stolen data since March 2022, including files it provided the nonprofit news site Forbidden Stories a year prior for an exposé about corruption involving Guatemalan officials and a Swiss mining conglomerate. Their hacking operations have targeted what the group says is the exploitation of indigenous lands throughout Mexico and Central and South America. So far, the leaks have led to the resignation of one of Chile’s top military officials.</p> <p>“Guacamaya is definitely one of the most responsible and impactful hacktivist groups we’ve seen in recent years,” said Emma Best, a journalist and transparency advocate who co-founded Distributed Denial of Secrets, or DDoSecrets, a nonprofit “transparency collective” that hosts hacked and leaked material and distributes it in the public interest to journalists and researchers. Fuerzas Represivas — the campaign published Sept. 19 that included more than 13 terabytes of data — “was the largest leak in history, and instead of dumping the files on the open internet they came to us and Enlace Hacktivista and asked us to make sure journalists and researchers were able to work with the data.”</p> <p>The impact in Latin and South America, Best said, “has been large but understated, and its full effect is going to continue to play out for months and years to come.”</p> <p>THE HACKERS</p> <p>It’s not clear who the hackers are, nor where they live. They would not answer specific questions about their backgrounds or technical abilities. “We are regular people, we are people from any city, town, region who became aware of this tool,” they said. “Anyone can do what we have done.” They say their efforts are</p>

driven by the “invasions and oppressions” Latin Americans have faced over the years. And they are attempting to fight back in the best way they know how — through hacking.

The group makes its leaks available upon request either to [Enlace Hactivista](#) — a website dedicated to hosting hacked materials and messages from hackers — or DDoSecrets. Both sites say they evaluate the requester before providing access. Best said requesters are evaluated on their past work, whether they contribute to journalism or public research, and that those with vague goals and other concerns are denied. Enlace Hactivista did not respond to a request for comment.

The members of Guacamaya with whom CyberScoop communicated said they’re aware of the widespread speculation about their identities and on whose behalf they operate. The group’s critics have questioned whether they’ll attack only left-wing governments and have accused them of working with the CIA, they said. “It seems to us like a desire to distract and to lose our message in these discussions,” they said. “We notice an attitude of disbelief when we say that we are ordinary people. They are surprised and do not believe in the capacity of our communities, of us, common people. They only believe in the capacity of great powers. That is how they have dominated us, using denigration and humiliation.”

With each hack, Guacamaya publishes a lengthy treatise, all of which have hit a similar theme: The corporate and government power structures throughout [Abya Yala](#) — an indigenous term for the American continent in its entirety — enable an exploitative and violent system that ensures the subjugation, abuse and misery of local populations in service of American and European capitalists.

“The police entities of Abya Yala, like the army, are armed entities that guarantee oppression, injustice and terror against the peoples, guaranteeing the dispossession of the land of peasants, indigenous and Afro-descendant people,” the group wrote in [the message posted with Fuerzas Represivas](#), or Repressive Forces, the release that contained six terabytes of Mexican military documents. “They guarantee extractivism. They guarantee neoliberal and capitalist systems.”

The group also posts messages about their operations and their justifications for carrying them out on Enlace Hactivista and DDoSecrets. A review of the communiqués, as well as the correspondence with CyberScoop, suggests multiple authors either collaborating or penning the individual messages. The group confirmed the diversity of its membership in a message: “Cierto, no somos ni una persona ni un pueblo sino muchos pueblos,” they said. *We are neither one person nor one people but many peoples.*

[Juan Andrés Guerrero-Saade](#), senior director of Sentinellabs and a former senior cybersecurity and national security adviser to the government of Ecuador, agreed that most analysts or officials expect operations such as these, with major results, to have connections to nation-states or criminal syndicates.

“For those of us who have grown accustomed to nation-state plays, or criminal plays that ultimately have some semblance of a goal and expect some kind of [return on investment], it’s that much harder to understand someone who says, ‘Well, you know, we’re just doing this because f— you, that’s why,’ he said.

Furthermore, many threat researchers are generally unfamiliar with Latin America’s political and socio-technical context. The region is “particularly underserved on all things cyber, whether defense against prolific and long-running cybercrime or nation-state operations, both local and from abroad, Guerrero-Saade said. “Latin America is not being prioritized or well served,” he said, due to a variety of reasons such as finances and complex local context. “If you’re not there, if you don’t care, if you don’t know what’s going on, it’s very hard to do that properly.”

[Gabriella Coleman](#), an anthropology professor at Harvard who’s studied and [written extensively](#) about hacker culture, said that although it’s notoriously difficult to know truly who’s behind these kinds of operations, “aesthetics and style actually may make a real difference.”

Guacamaya pairs its leaks with videos, vivid illustrations that evoke indigenous artwork and music, alongside the messages for every hack. The videos include catchy hip hop, with lyrics flicking at

revolutionary and people-powered themes with a hint of hacking sprinkled throughout. “A lot of care went into the music,” the group told CyberScoop.

The “political and aesthetic sensibilities” of the group are front and center in their public pronouncements, Coleman said. “In that sense, I think that these really are authentic political activists coming from the ground up, as opposed from the top down.” For instance, she said, their style demonstrates a deep understanding of Latin American culture and political ideology. In many ways, their approach resembles the work of [Phineas Fisher](#), a leftist hacktivist perhaps best known for targeting digital surveillance companies.

For [Tom Uren](#), formerly of the Australian Signals Directorate and a current editor with Seriously Risky Business cybersecurity news, assessing hacktivism claims comes down to “does what they hack and what they leak actually line up with what they say, and does that line up with their capabilities and the vulnerabilities they’ve claimed to exploit.

“On all those metrics, Guacamaya pretty much seems authentic,” Uren said. “Usually, the state-backed groups, they don’t bother to make such a good effort,” he added. “There’s no reason a state backed group couldn’t make an effort, it’s just that they typically don’t bother.”

THE HACKS AND IMPACT

While the group’s hack-and-leak operations have gained global attention, real world consequences are harder to assess. The most direct and high-profile impact occurred in Chile, where Gen. Guillermo Paiva Hernández, head of the country’s Joint Chiefs of Staff, [resigned in September](#) over the embarrassment of the leak.

Officials in Peru attempted to quash coverage of the leaks there. A Peruvian military official threatened to bring treason charges against [Ernesto Cabral](#), a journalist with the independent Peruvian news outlet La Encerrona, when he initially reported on the material, the reporter told CyberScoop.

La Encerrona [wrote extensively about Guacamaya’s Peruvian leaks](#), [covering](#) revelations the Peruvian military had been monitoring left-wing parties and specific left-wing figures as threats to the state. The files also revealed that the Peruvian military deemed civil organizations in the region a threat because they “infiltrate and advise the population against mining,” [La Encerrona tweeted](#), according to a Google translation.

Cabral said journalists and NGOs in Peru are now more cautious with their communications after the military files revealed extensive monitoring of reporters. Overall, the reaction among the public and the politicians has been mixed, he said.

“The majority of the politicians here, the lawmakers and also the president, they agree that this kind of behavior from the military and police is OK, there isn’t anything wrong in doing it,” Cabral said. “That was also one of the main responses we had, at least on social media, from a lot of citizens.” Cabral noted that an earlier hack-and-leak operation targeting Peruvian law enforcement records in April 2022, allegedly [carried out by a person affiliated with the Conti ransomware gang](#), had already begun to reveal government misdeeds, perhaps dulling the public reaction to the Guacamaya operation.

But there has been “major coverage from a lot of newsrooms” across the country, he said. “Because the army was targeting their politicians, their representatives, the NGOs working in the south of Peru supporting the community against what they call misbehaviors of the mining companies,” he said. “So it was relevant for them.”

A big part of the story, Cabral noted, was that the Guacamaya files revealed information that “threatened the lives” of Peruvian soldiers battling drug trafficking organizations. This was one of the reasons why Cabral and some other journalists were frustrated when the Peruvian military tried to downplay the information. “There is sensitive information,” he said. “Information that can be dangerous, not only for the NGOs or the civil society, but for the soldiers.”

Similar safety concerns surfaced in Australia. In October, the [Sydney Morning Herald reported](#) that the leaks related to Colombia “exposed the identities and methods of secret agents working to stop international drug cartels from operating in Australia.” Details from 35 Australian Federal Police operations, some ongoing, were leaked, and “many overseas police agencies were also affected,” the paper reported.

An AFP spokesperson told CyberScoop in a statement that the agency is “concerned about possible breaches of operational security as a consequence of this data compromise.” Additionally, the agency is “assessing the information that may have been obtained from Colombian law enforcement as part of this hacking activity,” and is working with “international partners” and Colombian law enforcement to “safeguard their computer systems.”

The group does appear to consider the potential harm. For instance, Guacamaya required anyone who wanted the Fuerzas Represivas dataset to directly request access to it. In a message [posted alongside the Mexican military documents](#), the group said it wanted “everyone to have access to the leak,” but that was not possible “since there is information that in the hands of drug traffickers could put many people at risk.” Even still, the materials had been shared with several journalists, the group said, “whether we like [their] politics and [their] reporting or not.”

In Chile, reporters used the documents to expose [Peru's contingency plans for potential war](#) with Chile. “Everything is there, from the trajectories that the units would follow, to the deception strategies that would be implemented to distract the Chilean forces,” Chile’s Center for Journalistic Investigation reported. In a separate story, the [center reported on “highly sensitive” files](#) related to Colombia’s military and political relationship to the U.S., Washington’s fears about Chinese influence in South America and apparent Russian military communications systems operating in Venezuela near the Colombian border.

The leaks also revealed detailed coordination between U.S. and Mexican armed forces in the fight against drug trafficking, [El País reported in October](#). The files showed that although Mexican President López Obrador “may have said that Washington has not been involved in the recent offensives against organized crime, the two countries have been working closely together,” the paper reported.

In Mexico, it will take months or perhaps years for the information contained in leaks to be verified and reported by journalists or researchers, and this has contributed to stories from the leaks largely fizzling out, said Hiram Alejandro the co-founder and CEO of cybersecurity firm [Seekurity](#) in Mexico City. Many reporters aren’t technically equipped to access the large amounts of data and parse it for stories, or they don’t want to press too hard on sensitive information given that Mexico is one of the most dangerous places in the world for journalists. And the Mexican government’s downplaying of material included in the leaks has further diminished the story’s momentum.

According to Alejandro, a “well-known” Mexican reporter who told him that they wanted to dig deeper into the files, but they didn’t want to put themselves in danger. Exposing both sensitive information and the lack of basic cybersecurity could help Mexico’s adversaries attack the country, or steal information.

Alejandro and his journalist friends aren’t the only ones pointing out the difficulties many local reporters face attempting to cover the leaks, whether in Mexico, Peru, Chile, Colombia or elsewhere in Latin America.

Guacamaya also acknowledges the dangers. In its first interview, the group [told Forbidden Stories’ Laurent Richard](#) that one of the reasons it shared its first hack with the French-based consortium was because “being an international media made it less risky,” and that “sending it to the local press would put them at risk because they have already been imprisoned or threatened.” Exposing Mexican military documents could reveal details about operations against drug traffickers, Guacamaya said, and “put many people at risk.”

Guacamaya declined to say whether more leaks are coming — “we are looking at some things, we can’t say more” — but also said they aren’t worried about governments they’ve exposed, or corporations

	they've embarrassed, to come back at them. "We are the people whose rights have already been violated and against whom these states, this oppressive system in all aspects, have exercised all kinds of abuses," they told CyberScoop. "We do not know if they can do more to us. We doubt it."
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HEADLINE	01/19 Daixin poses critical threat to healthcare
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/ransomware/daixin-ransomware-poses-critical-threat-to-healthcare-says-aha-cyber-chief
GIST	<p>Reports consistently note the rising risk to patient safety after a ransomware attack. But the most pressing variant facing healthcare is Daixin, a technologically advanced, stealthy, and long-lasting malware attributed to China, according to American Hospital Association's Senior Advisor for Cybersecurity and Risk John Riggi.</p> <p>Riggi spoke to sector leaders during a University of California San Francisco Stanford Center of Excellence in Regulatory Science and Innovation discussion on Tuesday, outlining the risk areas providers should be working to address into the foreseeable future.</p> <p>He also had a stern warning for provider organizations still dragging their feet on implementing multi-factor authentication across the enterprise, particularly as threat actors continue to target critical infrastructure and supply chain partners in force.</p> <p>"If we're not doing MFA at this point, it would be hard to defend both civilly and regulatory the actions against you as it is a very, very basic technique at this point," said Riggi. "The White House has implored us to implement basic cybersecurity procedures, which alone at a very low costs could prevent a significant portion of ransomware attacks."</p> <p>MFA should be at the top of the list for securing all remote access points into the organization, as the threat of ransomware and other cyberattacks continue to plague the sector and cyber insurance becomes less and less of a guarantee, he added.</p> <p>Versions of Daixin have been used in attacks in various forms over the last decade, with researchers observing a resurgence of a refined variant in February 2022. Symantec described the threat "as the most advanced piece of malware" they'd ever seen from China-backed attackers. Daixin is used in both "smash-and-grab operations" and for stealthy operations.</p> <p>The most prevalent goal of these attacks appears to be espionage, hijacking legitimate TCP/IP service and listening on port 80 for traffic patterns it can interpret as commands.</p> <p>In healthcare, Daixin has claimed multiple victims that include the cyberattack on OakBend Medical Center in September 2022. The incident led to weeks of network downtime and the alleged theft of patient health information from the hospital's internal servers. Data proofs of the stolen data were leaked on the Daixin dark website.</p> <p>Daixin was also behind the major attack on AirAsia in November, as well as Fitzgibbon Hospital, Trib Total Media, and ista International GmbH.</p> <p>The impact of these attacks led to multiple federal agency alerts, including one directed to the healthcare sector that warned public health and healthcare sectors were predominant targets. Riggi expects this relentless targeting to continue into the foreseeable future.</p> <p>Chinese government using Daixin to target intellectual property</p> <p>For Riggi, the risk of Daixin and other nation-state actors is multi-faceted. There's clearly a goal to gain access to patient data or to disrupt operations for a quick payout, but these actors are specifically targeting the troves of medical research and innovation, some of which is tied to medical device development and medical technology.</p>

The Chinese government is one of the “most prolific and aggressive” of these groups, specifically targeting “intellectual property,” he explained. The government has even issued a plan to be globally dominant by 2049, not just militarily but “by being economically dominant, including in healthcare and specifically medical technology.”

Device manufacturers should view these plans as a call to action, and to “think about your proprietary information in your medical technology, who might be after that for their own economic gain, or to understand the complexity of the software the design for possible future exploitation once sold and deployed into the healthcare environment,” said Riggi.

These attackers aren’t heavily leaning on new and high-falutin tactics to crack into networks. Riggi explained that it’s the tried-and-true methods that the hackers have been and will continue to use to gain access to victim’s systems, including exploiting vulnerabilities in medical devices and phishing attacks. “Quite frankly, the way the bad guys are getting in is they’re exploiting known and published vulnerabilities: they’re simply beating us to the patch,” said Riggi. Entities must work to expedite the patching processes, even though it’s difficult with medical devices.

Every entity in the sector needs to review the past successful attacks deployed against the sector and learn from past mistakes. Citing the [outages brought on by Kronos](#) and others, Riggi reiterated the importance of integrating cyber incident response plans with emergency preparedness plans and with disaster recovery, business continuity plans and downtime procedures.

Business continuity, in particular, should be refined and well-practiced, he warned. That means understanding the criticality of the tech used to support all care models and ensure delivery to the patients who need care the most, such as emergency and cancer patients.

Third-party and second-party impacts must be calculated into those plans as well, using this information to establish downtime procedures when supply chain partners go down.

“We have come to learn the painful lesson that cyber risk in healthcare is not just an IT issue, it’s an enterprise risk issue that impacts every function of the organization,” said Riggi. “Most importantly, it impacts the ability of hospitals and health systems to deliver patient care, and it does present a risk to patient safety.”

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HEADLINE	01/19 Hackers shift malicious macros to LNK files
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/news/malware/threat-actors-said-to-shift-from-malicious-macros-to-lnk-files
GIST	<p>Researchers from Cisco Talos on Thursday detailed how Microsoft’s decision last year to block macros sparked threat actors to shift from malicious macros to exploiting Shell Link (LNK) files.</p> <p>In a blog post, Cisco Talos researchers explained that LNK files are the way the Microsoft Windows Operating System references file objects in local or remote disk locations. They can either point to an actual file or folder, or to a command that needs to be executed with specific parameters.</p> <p>Threat actors abuse these features to activate or instrument their malware by using LNK files that purport as benign files of interest to their targets, say the researchers.</p> <p>Guilherme Venere, a threat researcher at Cisco Talos, said threat actors are usually motivated by two objectives: they either look for financial gain or in the case of nation-state actors, obtaining information for espionage. Venere said successful infections of victims are paramount to these malicious campaigns.</p> <p>“Therefore, threat actors will quickly adapt and experiment with new techniques and discard old methods in favor of something new or more efficient,” explained Venere. “The takeaway from this research is that sometimes these actors forget to cover their tracks. A quick turnaround time and ever-changing techniques</p>

lead to residual indicators in malicious artifacts that can be leveraged by defenders to track and block such threats.”

Mike Parkin, senior technical engineer at Vulcan Cyber, said we’ve seen threat actors evolve rapidly in response to changes in their target’s defenses or to changes in attack surface. Parkin said Office macros had been a favorite vector, so it was no surprise attackers found something else to use in the form of LNK files.

“These files link to various ‘objects’ and are often used as shortcuts, but can contain quite a bit of additional information,” Parkin said. “By carefully crafting these LNK files, threat actors can get them to bypass some of the safeguards in place and have them execute download and execute malicious code, among other things. The attackers quick change of approach from macros to LNK files points out that we are dealing with adversaries who can be quite creative in finding new ways to abuse existing functionality.”

Phil Neray, vice president of cyber defense strategy at CardinalOps, added that initial access via malicious LNK files is a clever technique [that's been used for years](#), including in the Stuxnet attacks that were first uncovered in 2010. Neray said It's an effective technique because it exploits a fundamental feature of Windows, which is automatically launching executables using the metadata stored in the LNK file.

“In these examples, the executable is a PowerShell script that then downloads and executes a malicious binary from a remote, adversary-controlled host,” Neray said. “To protect against this type of adversary playbook, organizations should use endpoint controls to restrict access to LNK files and prevent suspicious execution of PowerShell code, along with email security to scan attachments for malicious files, and network monitoring to prevent access to suspicious hosts.”

Jerrold Piker, competitive intelligence analyst at Deep Instinct, said attackers are using many methods to trick users into launching LNK files that point to malware, such as Emotet and Trickbot, among other nasty families.

“Phishing emails and malicious URLs have been used in recent months by threat actors to this end,” Piker said. “Because LNK files can include command parameters in their launch properties or point to scripting applications such as PowerShell, a user may not even be aware of what’s happening when they interact with a LNK file.”

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HEADLINE	01/19 Roaming Mantis' hacking campaign
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/roaming-mantis-adds-dns-changer/
GIST	<p>The threat actor known as Roaming Mantis (or Shaoye) has reportedly added a DNS changer function to its latest mobile app Wroba.o to infiltrate WiFi routers and undertake DNS hijacking.</p> <p>The findings come from Kaspersky's SecureList researchers, who published an advisory about Roaming Mantis earlier today.</p> <p>According to the technical write-up, the threat actor has been conducting a long-term campaign that uses malicious Android package (APK) files to control infected Android devices and obtain device information.</p> <p>"Back in 2018, Kaspersky first saw Roaming Mantis activities targeting the Asian region, including Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. At that time, the criminals compromised Wi-Fi routers for use in DNS hijacking, which is a very effective technique," reads the advisory.</p> <p>"From mid-2019 until 2022, the criminals mainly used smishing instead of DNS hijacking to deliver a malicious URL as their landing page."</p>

This page, [Kaspersky](#) wrote, identified the user's device platform to deliver malicious APK files for Android or redirect to phishing pages for iOS.

"In September 2022, we [...] discovered the DNS changer was implemented to target specific Wi-Fi routers. It obtains the default gateway IP address as the connected Wi-Fi router IP and checks the device model from the router's admin web interface."

The security researchers also discovered that the feature was implemented to mainly target WiFi routers located in South Korea. Victims of Roaming Mantis were also spotted in France, Japan, Germany, the US, Taiwan, Turkey and other regions.

"We believe that the discovery of this new DNS changer implementation is very important in terms of security," SecureList warned.

"The attacker can use it to manage all communications from devices using a compromised Wi-Fi router with rogue DNS settings. For instance, the attacker can redirect to malicious hosts and interfere with security product updates."

Kaspersky said they see the potential for the group to use the DNS changer to target other regions and cause significant issues. To help companies spot Roaming Mantis' Wroba.o infections, a list of indicators of compromise (IoC) is available in the SecureList [advisory](#).

Its publication comes weeks after Google announced it is increasingly improving Android security with [memory-safe programming languages](#).

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HEADLINE	01/19 'Blank Image' attack hides phishing scripts
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/new-blank-image-attack-hides-phishing-scripts-in-svg-files/
GIST	<p>An unusual phishing technique has been observed in the wild, hiding empty SVG files inside HTML attachments pretending to be DocuSign documents.</p> <p>Security researchers at email security provider Avanan named it "Blank Image." They explain that the attack allows phishing actors to evade detection of redirect URLs.</p> <p>Phishing campaign</p> <p>The phishing email sent to prospective victims purports to be a document from DocuSign, a widely abused brand as many recipients are familiar with it from their office jobs.</p> <p>The victim is requested to review and sign the sent document that is named "Scanned Remittance Advice.htm."</p> <p>HTML files are popular among phishing actors because they are typically ignored by email security products and thus have higher chances of reaching the target's inbox.</p> <p>If a victim clicks on the "View Completed Document" button, they are taken to a genuine DocuSign webpage. However, if they attempt to open the HTML attachment, the 'Blank Image' attack is activated.</p> <p>SVG smuggling code</p> <p>The HTML file contains an SVG image encoded using the Base64 encoding format with an embedded JavaScript code that redirects the victim automatically to the malicious URL.</p> <p>The SVG image does not contain any graphics or shapes, so it renders nothing on the screen. Its role is that of merely a placeholder for the malicious script.</p>

	<p>It's worth noting that the use of SVG files inside HTML containing base64-obfuscated code isn't new. The same technique was observed in malspam delivering Qbot malware in December 2022.</p> <p>Unlike raster images, like JPG and PNG, SVGs are vector images based on XML and can contain HTML script tags. When an HTML document displays an SVG image through an <embed> or <iframe> tag, the image is displayed and the JavaScript inside it executes.</p> <p>In the DocuSign-themed campaign that Avanan researcher spotted, the SVG is empty. The victim sees nothing on their screen but the URL redirect code still runs in the background.</p> <p>Users should treat emails with HTML code in them and .HTM attachments with caution. Avanan also suggests that administrators should consider blocking them.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 New 'Hook' Android malware
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/new-hook-android-malware-lets-hackers-remotely-control-your-phone/
GIST	<p>A new Android malware named 'Hook' is being sold by cybercriminals, boasting it can remotely take over mobile devices in real-time using VNC (virtual network computing).</p> <p>The new malware is promoted by the creator of Ermac, an Android banking trojan selling for \$5,000/month that helps threat actors steal credentials from over 467 banking and crypto apps via overlaid login pages.</p> <p>While the author of Hook claims the new malware was written from scratch, and despite having several additional features compared to Ermac, researchers at ThreatFabric dispute these claims and report seeing extensive code overlaps between the two families.</p> <p>ThreatFabric explains that Hook contains most of Ermac's code base, so it's still a banking trojan. At the same time, it includes several unnecessary parts found in the older strain that indicate it re-used code in bulk.</p> <p>A more dangerous Android malware</p> <p>Despite its origin, Hook is an evolution of Ermac, offering an extensive set of capabilities that make it a more dangerous threat to Android users.</p> <p>One new feature of Hook compared to Ermac is the introduction of WebSocket communication that comes in addition to HTTP traffic used exclusively by Ermac. The network traffic is still encrypted using an AES-256-CBC hardcoded key.</p> <p>The highlight addition, however, is the 'VNC' module that gives threat actors the capability to interact with the user interface of the compromised device in real-time.</p> <p>This new system enables Hook's operators to perform any action on the device, from PII exfiltration to monetary transactions.</p> <p>"With this feature, Hook joins the ranks of malware families that are able to perform full DTO, and complete a full fraud chain, from PII exfiltration to transaction, with all the intermediate steps, without the need of additional channels," warns ThreatFabric.</p> <p>"This kind of operation is much harder to detect by fraud scoring engines, and is the main selling point for Android bankers."</p> <p>The catch is that Hook's VNC requires Accessibility Service access to work, which might be hard to get on devices running Android 11 or later.</p>

Hook's new (in addition to Ermac's) commands can perform the following actions:

- Start/stop RAT
- Perform a specific swipe gesture
- Take a screenshot
- Simulate click at specific text item
- Simulate a key press (HOME/BACK/RECENTS/LOCK/POWERDIALOG)
- Unlock the device
- Scroll up/down
- Simulate a long press event
- Simulate click at a specific coordinate
- Set clipboard value to a UI element with specific coordinates value
- Simulate click on a UI element with a specific text value
- Set a UI element value to a specific text

Apart from the above, a "File Manager" command turns the malware into a file manager, allowing the threat actors to get a list of all files stored in the device and download specific files of their choice.

Another notable command that ThreatFabric found concerns WhatsApp, allowing Hook to log all messages in the popular IM app and even allowing the operators to send messages via the victim's account. Finally, a new geolocation tracking system enables Hook operators to track the victim's precise position by abusing the "Access Fine Location" permission.

Worldwide targeting

Hook's target banking applications impact users in the United States, Spain, Australia, Poland, Canada, Turkey, the UK, France, Italy, and Portugal.

However, it is essential to note that Hook's broad targeting scope covers the entire world. ThreatFabric listed all the apps Hook targets in the [report's appendix](#) for those interested.

At this time, Hook is distributed as a Google Chrome APK under the package names "com.lojibiwawajinu.guna," "com.damariwonomiwi.docebi," "com.damariwonomiwi.docebi," and "com.yecomevusaso.pisifo," but of course, this could change at any moment.

To avoid becoming infected with Android malware, you should only install apps from the Google Play Store or those provided by your employer.

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HEADLINE	01/19 Telecom provider networks targeted
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/threat-intelligence/cybercriminals-target-telecom-provider-networks
GIST	<p>The growing use of mobile devices for multifactor authentication increasingly has made telecom providers a juicy target for cybercrime. An ongoing SIM card-swapping campaign by a Chinese threat actor called "Scattered Spider" is just the latest example of that trend.</p> <p>Scattered Spider is an APT group that researchers from CrowdStrike have been tracking for the past several months. The group has been targeting telecom companies and business-process outsourcing (BPO) firms that support these telecom companies with the objective of gaining access to their respective carrier networks.</p> <p>SIM-Jacking Via the Carrier Network</p> <p>In at least two instances where the threat actor gained that access, they used it to do SIM swapping, a process where an adversary essentially transfers another person's phone number to their SIM card. Attackers can then use the hijacked phone number to access bank accounts or any other account where the legitimate user might have registered the phone as a second form of authentication. SIM jacking also gives attackers a way to register and associate rogue devices to accounts on compromised networks.</p>

Bud Broomhead, CEO at Viakoo, says the wide use of mobile networks for multifactor authentication has painted a big target on telecom providers. "While there have always been efforts to breach telecom systems, the increased reliance on them for security has increased the frequency of attacks against them," he says.

In the campaigns that CrowdStrike observed, Scattered Spider gained initial access to a targeted telecom or BPO network by impersonating IT personnel and convincing individuals working at these organizations to part with their credentials or to grant remote access to their computers. Once inside the target environment the threat actors moved laterally across it — often using legitimate tools such as Windows Management Instrumentation — till they gained access to the carrier network.

The group has targeted multiple telecom firms since at least June 2022 and has simply kept moving to different targets each time it gets booted from one, prompting CrowdStrike to describe the campaign as an "extremely persistent and brazen" threat. Recently, CrowdStrike observed Scattered Spider deploy a [malicious kernel driver via a vulnerability exploit](#) as part of its attack chain.

Adam Meyers, senior vice president of intelligence at CrowdStrike, says Scattered Spider's campaign appears to be financially motivated and therefore different from the many attacks on carrier networks focused on cyber espionage.

"Based on what we have seen, they are focused on SIM swapping," Meyers says. "When you have two factor-authentication and do a SIM swap, you can bypass that authentication."

Crime v. Espionage

Campaigns like Scattered Spider represent a relatively new kind of attack on carrier networks. In recent years, many campaigns that targeted telecom companies have focused on some form of intelligence-gathering activity and have often involved advanced persistent threat groups from countries such as China, Iran, and Turkey, Meyers notes. The goal usually is to intercept communications and to harvest the detailed information available in call data records (CDRs), he says. CDRs can be very powerful for monitoring and tracking individuals, he says.

Back in 2019, Cybereason reported on one such campaign that it dubbed [Operation Soft Cell](#), where a Chinese APT group infiltrated carrier networks belonging to a major telecommunication company to steal CDRs. The security vendor assessed at the time that the campaign had been active since at least 2012, giving the threat actor access to data that would have helped the government target politicians, foreign intelligence agencies, dissidents, law enforcement, and others.

In 2021, CrowdStrike reported on a multi-year campaign where a threat actor called Light Basin broke into at least 13 telecom networks worldwide and [systematically stole Mobile Subscriber Identity \(IMSI\) data](#) and call metadata on users. The threat actor installed tools on the carrier networks that allowed it to intercept call and text messages, call information, and records for tracking and monitoring targeted individuals.

More recently, Bitdefender reported observing a Chinese threat actor [targeting a telecom firm in the Middle East](#) in a cyber-espionage campaign. "The attack carries the hallmarks of BackdoorDiplomacy, a known APT group with ties to China," says Danny O'Neill, director of MDR operations at Bitdefender. The initial compromise used binaries vulnerable to side-loading techniques and likely involved an exploit of the ProxyShell vulnerability in Microsoft Exchange Server, he says.

"Once inside, the APT used multiple tools — some legit and some custom — and malware to spy, move laterally across the environment, and evade detection," he says.

Catalysts for More Attacks?

Meyers and others expect that the proliferation of 5G networks and VoIP services in general in coming years will make it easier for threat actors to execute these attacks on telecommunication companies. Newer telecom services such as 5G are susceptible to cyberattacks because everything — including the core

networks — are software designed, O'Neill says. That means all the risks associated with software technologies will [manifest on carrier networks](#) as well, he says.

"There are going to be a greater number of cells, pico-cells, and micro-cells required to deliver the coverage given the much higher operating frequencies of 5G," O'Neill points out. From an attacker's perspective, this equates to more access and entry points, he says.

"The almost universal adoption of voice over IP technology has made pretty much every network a data network and blurred the lines between mediums," says Mike Parkin, senior technical engineer at Vulcan Cyber. "It's hard to separate old school voice telecommunication from today's data networks," he says.

Why Disruptive Cyberattacks Remain Rare

One notable aspect of attacks on carrier networks is that very few so far have involved attempts to cause widespread service outages or sabotage — a major concern with attacks on organizations in other critical infrastructure sectors. In its 2019 report, Cybereason in fact had noted how the attackers could have used their access on the telecom network to do pretty much anything they had wanted: "A threat actor with total access to a telecommunications provider, as is the case here, can attack however they want passively and also actively work to sabotage the network."

That is an assessment that Meyers shares about the Scattered Spider campaign as well.

One reason why disruptive cyberattacks on telecom infrastructure might not have happened so far is because they are really not necessary.

"The primary motivation for attacks on signal-carrying networks is espionage," says John Bambenek, principal threat hunter at Netenrich. "Certainly, there are sabotage interests, but those are usually correlated to the proximity of physical conflict." As an example, he points to Russian attacks on Ukraine's telecom infrastructure at the start of the war.

Pulling off a disruptive cyberattack on a telecom network often is not needed because other, more straightforward options are available. "What we see many examples of is disruption due to physical means. Getting a little out of hand with a backhoe in the wrong place has disrupted communications for entire metropolitan areas," he says.

The shift to VoIP means old school tactics such as DDoS attacks could soon become an effective way to disrupt a carrier network, adds Parkin. Even so, other methods are easier, he says.

"A crowbar can gain access to a wiring trunk, and a pair of bolt cutters can make short work of the cables inside," Parkin says. "Taking out wireless communications takes more sophisticated equipment, but a couple of signal jammers could take down a surprisingly large area."

Regs to the Rescue

Going forward, governments and regulatory bodies will have to take a more active role in ensuring the security of the telecom sector against cyberattacks. Parkin points to recent steps by the US, UK, and other governments to mitigate against perceived "high risk" vendors and equipment manufacturers that sit at the core of telco networks as an example of what's needed in future.

"Government influence in achieving end-to-end cybersecurity should focus foremost on governance and regulatory requirements," O'Neill notes. "Existing policies and standards need to be developed and strengthened to incorporate new services like 5G."

He fears that operators, if left unchecked, could default to focusing on availability and convenience at the expense of security.

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SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/paypal-accounts-breached-in-large-scale-credential-stuffing-attack/?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>PayPal is sending out data breach notifications to thousands of users who had their accounts accessed through credential stuffing attacks that exposed some personal data.</p> <p>Credential stuffing are attacks where hackers attempt to access an account by trying out username and password pairs sourced from data leaks on various websites.</p> <p>This type of attack relies on an automated approach with bots running lists of credentials to "stuff" into login portals for various services.</p> <p>Credential stuffing targets users that employ the same password for multiple online accounts, which is known as "password recycling."</p> <p>Close to 35,000 users impacted</p> <p>PayPal explains that the credential stuffing attack occurred between December 6 and December 8, 2022. The company detected and mitigated it at the time but also started an internal investigation to find out how the hackers obtained access to the accounts.</p> <p>By December 20, 2022, PayPal concluded its investigation, confirming that unauthorized third parties logged into the accounts with valid credentials.</p> <p>The electronic payments platform claims that this was not due to a breach on its systems and has no evidence that the user credentials were obtained directly from them.</p> <p>According to the data breach reporting from PayPal, 34,942 of its users have been impacted by the incident. During the two days, hackers had access to account holders' full names, dates of birth, postal addresses, social security numbers, and individual tax identification numbers.</p> <p>Transaction histories, connected credit or debit card details, and PayPal invoicing data are also accessible on PayPal accounts.</p> <p>PayPal says it took timely action to limit the intruders' access to the platform and reset the passwords of accounts confirmed to have been breached.</p> <p>Also, the notification claims that the attackers have not attempted or did not manage to perform any transactions from the breached PayPal accounts.</p> <p>"We have no information suggesting that any of your personal information was misused as a result of this incident, or that there are any unauthorized transactions on your account," reads PayPal's notification to impacted users.</p> <p>"We reset the passwords of the affected PayPal accounts and implemented enhanced security controls that will require you to establish a new password the next time you log in to your account" – PayPal</p> <p>Impacted users will receive a free-of-charge two-year identity monitoring service from Equifax.</p> <p>The company strongly recommends that recipients of the notices change the passwords for other online accounts using a unique and long string. Typically, a good password is at least 12-characters long and includes alphanumeric characters and symbols.</p> <p>Moreover, PayPal advises users to activate two-factor authentication (2FA) protection from the 'Account Settings' menu, which can prevent an unauthorized party from accessing an account, even if they have a valid username and password.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 FBI head: concern over China A.I. program
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/19/fbi-chief-says-hes-deeply-concerned-by-chinas-arti/
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — FBI Director Christopher Wray said Thursday that he was “deeply concerned” about the Chinese government’s artificial intelligence program, asserting that it was “not constrained by the rule of law.”</p> <p>Speaking during a panel session at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Wray said Beijing’s AI ambitions were “built on top of massive troves of intellectual property and sensitive data that they’ve stolen over the years.”</p> <p>He said that left unchecked, China could use artificial intelligence advancements to further its hacking operations, intellectual property theft and repression of dissidents inside the country and beyond.</p> <p>“That’s something we’re deeply concerned about. I think everyone here should be deeply concerned about,” he said.</p> <p>More broadly, he said, “AI is a classic example of a technology where I have the same reaction every time. I think, ‘Wow, We can do that?’ And then I think, ‘Oh god, they can do that.’”</p> <p>Such concerns have long been voiced by U.S. officials. In October 2021, for instance, U.S. counterintelligence officials issued warnings about China’s ambitions in AI as part of a renewed effort to inform business executives, academics and local and state government officials about the risks of accepting Chinese investment or expertise in key industries.</p> <p>Earlier that year, an AI commission led by former Google CEO Eric Schmidt urged the U.S. to boost its AI skills to counter China, including by pursuing “AI-enabled” weapons.</p> <p>A spokesperson for the Chinese Embassy in Washington did not immediately respond to a request seeking comment Thursday about Wray’s comments. Beijing has repeatedly accused Washington of fearmongering and attacked U.S. intelligence for its assessments of China.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 China limits kids to online gaming 1hr daily
SOURCE	https://www.seattlepi.com/entertainment/article/China-keeping-1-hour-daily-limit-on-kids-online-17729905.php
GIST	<p>HONG KONG (AP) — As the week-long Lunar New Year holidays in China draw near with promises of feasts and red envelopes stuffed with cash, children have another thing to look forward to — one extra hour of online games each day.</p> <p>Only one hour.</p> <p>For years, Chinese authorities have sought to control how much time kids can spend playing games online, to fight “internet addiction.” They've claimed success in curbing the problem but are taking no chances.</p> <p>In 2019, authorities restricted minors to playing 90 minutes a day on weekdays and banned them from playing between 10 p.m. and 8 a.m. In 2021, they issued even harsher restrictions: Minors are allowed to play online games for only an hour a day and only on Fridays, weekends and public holidays. Game approvals were halted for eight months.</p> <p>The Jan. 21-27 Lunar New Year holiday, China's biggest festival, will give them four extra days for online gaming.</p> <p>Many parents have lauded the restrictions, even as their children threw tantrums. Social media and games companies set up or strengthened “youth mode” settings on their apps meant to protect minors.</p>

They include features that limit use, control payments and display age-appropriate content. For some popular games, real-name registration and even facial recognition gateways have been implemented to prevent workarounds.

In November — more than a year after the stricter game controls were introduced — a government-affiliated industry group, Game Industry Group Committee, issued a report declared the gaming addiction problem among minors was “basically resolved,” even as the three-hour weekly limit for Friday, Saturday and Sunday stayed in place.

Overall, the Game Industry Group's report said, more than 75% of minors in China played online games for less than three hours a week and most parents expressed satisfaction with the new restrictions.

A report by games market intelligence firm Niko Partners in September found that the number of youth gamers declined to 82.6 million in 2022 from its peak of 122 million in 2020 as a direct result of China's regulations.

Beijing resident Zhong Feifei said her 11-year-old daughter has spent less time on games since the restrictions came into effect. “My daughter gave up playing online games during the prohibited time,”

Zhang has encouraged her daughter to play with other children or spend time on other activities.

“Even during the public holidays, she doesn't spend too much time gaming anymore because she has found something else to do, such as playing with our dog or other toys,” she said.

The Game Industry Group's report said the “biggest loophole” in the gaming restrictions was parents who help their kids bypass the controls. The harsh restrictions have also spawned an underground market where minors can buy “cracked” games that are unsupervised, or rent adult game accounts.

Zhong enjoys playing online games, too, but said she avoids doing so when with her child, leaving the house to play to try to set a good example.

Parents are the most important factor when it comes to curbing gaming addiction, said Tao Ran, director of the Adolescent Psychological Development Base in Beijing, which specializes in treating the problem.

Tao's estimates the restrictions and “youth mode” settings on apps have helped counter addiction to online gaming among younger children, who may not know how to find workarounds. Kids in middle school or high school tend to be more resourceful and often find ways to beat restrictions. That might mean convincing their parents to let them use their accounts, or figuring out passcodes to turn off “youth mode.”

With so many people trapped at home during the pandemic, kids were spending huge amounts online, noted Tao.

“The pandemic has contributed to more internet addiction, I haven't seen a reduction in the number of minors that are sent to our center to curb addiction each month,” said Tao, whose center treats an average of 20 kids with severe internet addiction each month.

“For many of these children with gaming addictions, we find that their parents play games often,” said Tao. “So these children, they look at their parents and think that it's okay to spend lots of time gaming, since their parents do it too.”

With the crackdown easing, regulators have resumed approving new games.

In February, NetEase, the country's second-biggest games firm, was awarded a license for Fantasy Life, a role-playing simulation game by Nintendo. However, the company's partnership with Activision

	<p>Blizzard is set to end by Jan. 23, which will see the withdrawal of hit titles such as Overwatch and World of Warcraft from the Chinese market until Blizzard finds a new domestic partner to publish its games.</p> <p>December brought green lights for the first batch of imported games in 18 months – with China’s biggest games firm, Tencent, receiving approvals for Riot Games’ tactical shooter game Valorant and the multiplayer online battle arena game Pokémon Unite.</p> <p>Not all parents agree with the government’s heavy-handed approach.</p> <p>Huang Yan, mother of a 12-year-old daughter and 7-year-old son in Beijing, said online gaming can foster teamwork and help children make friends.</p> <p>“I’m not against minors gaining access to the internet, games or social media, as this is an overall trend and it’s impossible to stop them,” she said. “It’s better to let them face these activities and intervene appropriately if they are unable to control themselves, and steer them toward other interests.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 Credential leakage fueling API breaches
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/credential-leakage-fueling-rise-api-breaches
GIST	<p>There is a problem with API security – it isn’t working very well, and it’s largely down to credential leakage. Most security professionals are confident in their own API credential management; but at the same time, most of the same professionals admit to having experienced a breach effected through compromised API credentials.</p> <p>In a survey of more than 400 US-based professionals (more than 90% of whom were developers or security people), 53% claimed to have suffered an API breach, while 77% claimed their company was very or extremely effective in managing their tokens. Only 3% believed they are not effective in protecting the credentials – and yet API breaches continue to rise.</p> <p>The cause of this apparent contradiction is probably threefold: a lack of visibility into existing APIs, the sheer volume of APIs that are in use, and the amount of time already being spent on managing the credentials for those APIs. The survey conducted by Corsha discovered that 64% of companies are managing more than 250 API credentials across their network (with 3% managing more than 1,000).</p> <p>This volume, and the company effort, is reflected in the amount of time spent on protecting them. Eighty-six percent of the respondents spend up to 15 hours every week provisioning, managing, and dealing with API secrets. That is time taken away from app development – making API secrets a costly and expensive exercise that still doesn’t work. Corsha costed this on an average developer’s salary of about \$120,000 per year: “That means each respondent could be spending up to \$44,460 per year on secrets management.”</p> <p>There would appear to be no way of preventing API credential leakage. Corsha sees them being leaked from code repositories, versioning control, CI build systems, test artifacts and cloud environments. This problem is only going to worsen. Cisco predicts there will be more than 500 million new digital applications in 2023. “More applications means that the army of machines requiring API access will only catapult,” notes the report.</p> <p>Credential rotation is one of the best manual practices to keep API secrets secret. Today, 27% of the survey respondents reported (PDF) that they rotate their API secrets only once per quarter, and sometimes only once per year. The strain on existing resources in a difficult economy combined with a growing API usage will make credential leakage more widespread, and credential rotation more problematic.</p> <p>“The heavy administrative workload and exceedingly manual processes for maintaining good security hygiene around secrets management create significant opportunities for error or oversight,” notes Scott Hopkins, COO at Corsha.</p>

“Security and engineering teams are forced to divert their attention away from forward-facing engineering to focus on secrets management, yet their organizations remain vulnerable to attackers both through lateral attacks and leaked or compromised API secrets to gain illegitimate access to sensitive data,” adds Jared Elder, Chief Growth Officer Corsha. “Data is everything and the potential risk from data breaches associated with leaked API secrets is clearly high and growing. Yet with an explosion of credentials to provision, rotate, and manage, the good guys find themselves constantly behind the eight ball.”

Corsha’s own solution to the problem is to add MFA to credential usage. This has several advantages. Firstly, since most of the APIs are internal on company networks, MFA from machine to machines is a form of microsegmentation that conforms to the principles of a zero trust architecture. This limits lateral movement by adversaries already in the network.

Secondly, one-time MFA from machine to machine is immune to one of the most successful MFA attacks used against humans – MFA fatigue attacks.

Thirdly, and perhaps most attractively, it removes the problem of credential rotation. Even if credentials are lost, stolen, or leaked, they cannot be used by adversaries who are unable to get through the MFA.

“That’s the problem we’re solving,” Anusha Iyer, co-founder and CEO at Corsha, told SecurityWeek. “If you have MFA in place, you don’t have to worry about the frequent rotation, and the same extensive hygiene of these static credentials.”

All the customer needs to do is place the Corsha proxy at a point where it can monitor the traffic. “We will see the traffic that is coming in with good credentials and good MFA tokens and allow it; and we’ll see the traffic that’s coming in with no MFA or bad MFA credentials and block it,” she added.

Bad credentials probably mean bad guys on the network – so Corsha’s solution increases both visibility and prevention. The core of the Corsha platform is a distributed ledger system. Corsha uses this as an out-of-band element in the generation and use of machine-to-machine MFA. “The process is analogous to Google Authenticator,” explained Iyer. “In one direction you’re keeping in sync with a seed on Google servers, while in the other direction you’re using that to check MFA credentials.”

Corsha was founded in 2018 by Anusha Iyer, and Chris Simkins. It is headquartered in Washington, DC. It raised \$12 million in a Series A funding round led by Ten Eleven Ventures and Razor’s Edge Ventures, with participation from 1843 Capital in April 2022.

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HEADLINE	01/19 Cybersecurity companies cutting staff
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/sophos-joins-list-cybersecurity-companies-cutting-staff
GIST	<p>Sophos has confirmed reports that it’s laying off employees. The company joins several other major cybersecurity companies that have announced cutting staff over the past year.</p> <p>The first reports of layoffs at Sophos came from India. The company confirmed to TechCrunch that 10% of its global employee base is impacted. While an exact number has not been shared, the news website learned that roughly 450 people — potentially from all roles — have lost their job.</p> <p>Sophos, which private equity firm Thoma Bravo acquired in 2020 for \$3.9 billion, blamed the layoffs on the global economic slowdown. The company says it wants to focus more on cybersecurity services, including managed detection and response.</p> <p>“Sophos is taking these steps for two main reasons: first, to ensure that we achieve the optimal balance of growth and profitability to support Sophos’ long-term success, which is particularly important in the midst of a challenging and uncertain macro environment; and second, to allocate our investments across the company to support our strategic imperative to be a market leader in delivering cybersecurity as a service,” a Sophos spokesperson told TechCrunch.</p>

Several major cybersecurity companies announced layoffs over the past year, including [Lacework](#), [OneTrust](#), and [Cybereason](#).

Microsoft announced this week plans to eliminate 10,000 jobs, but it's unclear if its security businesses units are impacted.

While major cybersecurity companies are announcing layoffs, many of those who have been terminated will likely not have any difficulties securing a job at a different company.

According to a recent study from nonprofit (ISC)², [the global cybersecurity workforce](#) is at an all-time high, with an estimated 4.7 million professionals.

However, (ISC)² estimates that an additional 3.4 million cybersecurity workers are needed, with 70% of the 11,000 professionals who took part in a survey conducted by the nonprofit saying that their organization does not have enough cybersecurity employees.

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HEADLINE	01/19 Sneaky ad scam tore thru 11M phones
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/vastflux-ad-fraud/
GIST	<p>EVERY TIME YOU open an app or website, a flurry of invisible processes takes place without you knowing. Behind the scenes, dozens of advertising companies are jostling for your attention: They want their ads in front of your eyeballs. For each ad, a series of instant auctions often determines which ads you see. This automated advertising, often known as programmatic advertising, is big business, with \$418 billion spent on it last year. But it's also ripe for abuse.</p> <p>Security researchers today revealed a new widespread attack on the online advertising ecosystem that has impacted millions of people, defrauded hundreds of companies, and potentially netted its creators some serious profits. The attack, dubbed Vastflux, was discovered by researchers at Human Security, a firm focusing on fraud and bot activity. The attack impacted 11 million phones, with the attackers spoofing 1,700 app and targeting 120 publishers. At its peak, the attackers were making 12 billion requests for ads per day.</p> <p>“When I first got the results for the volume of the attack, I had to run the numbers multiple times,” says Marion Habiby, a data scientist at Human Security and the lead researcher on the case. Habiby describes the attack as both one of the most sophisticated the company has seen and the largest. “It is clear the bad actors were well organized and went to great lengths to avoid detection, making sure the attack would run as long as possible—making as much money as possible,” Habiby says.</p> <p>Online and mobile advertising is a complex, often murky business. But it generates piles of money for those involved. Every day billions of ads are placed on websites and in apps—advertisers or ad networks pay to have their ads displayed and make money when people click on them or see them—and much of this is done as you open a website or an app.</p> <p>Vastflux was first detected by Human Security researcher Vikas Parthasarathy in the summer of 2022 while he was investigating a different threat. Habiby says operating the fraud involved multiple steps, and the attackers behind it took a range of measures to avoid being caught out.</p> <p>First, the group behind the attack—which Human Security hasn't named due to ongoing investigations—would target popular apps and try to buy an advertising slot within them. “They were not trying to hijack an entire phone, or an entire app, they were literally going through one ad slot,” Habiby says.</p> <p>Once Vastflux won the auction for an ad, the group would insert some malicious JavaScript code into that ad to stealthily allow multiple video ads to be stacked on top of each other.</p>

Put simply, the attackers were able to hijack the advertising system so that when a phone was displaying an ad within an affected app, there would actually be up to 25 ads placed on top of each other. The attackers would get paid for each ad, and you would only see one ad on your phone. However, your phone battery would drain faster than usual as it processed all the fraudulent ads.

“It’s quite genius because the minute the ad disappears, your attack stops, which means that you’re not going to be found easily,” Habiby explains.

The scale of this was colossal: In June 2022, at the peak of the group’s activity, it made 12 billion ad requests per day. Human Security says the attack primarily impacted iOS devices, although Android phones were also hit. In total, the fraud is estimated to have involved 11 million devices. There is little device owners could have done about the attack, as legitimate apps and advertising processes were impacted.

Google spokesperson Michael Aciman says the company has strict policies against “invalid traffic” and there was limited Vastflux “exposure” on its networks. “Our team thoroughly evaluated the report’s findings and took prompt enforcement action,” Aciman says. Apple did not respond to WIRED’s request for comment.

Mobile ad fraud can take many different forms. This can range, as with Vastflux, from types of ad stacking and phone farms to [click farms and SDK spoofing](#). For phone owners, batteries dying quickly, large jumps in data use, or screens turning on at random times could be signs a device is being impacted by ad fraud. In November 2018, the FBI’s biggest ad fraud investigation charged eight men with [running two notorious ad fraud schemes](#). (Human Security and other technology companies were involved in the investigation.) And in 2020, Uber won an ad fraud lawsuit after a company it hired to get more people to install its app did so through “[click flooding](#).”

In the case of Vastflux, the biggest impact of the attack was arguably on those involved in the sprawling advertising industry itself. The fraud affected both advertising companies and apps that show ads.

“They were trying to defraud all these different groups along the supply chain, with different tactics against very different ones,” says Zach Edwards, a senior manager of threat insights at Human Security.

To avoid being detected—up to 25 simultaneous ad requests from one phone would look suspicious—the group used multiple tactics. They spoofed the advertising details of 1,700 apps, making it look like lots of different apps were involved in showing the ads, when only one was being used. Vastflux also modified its ads to only allow certain tags to be attached to adverts, helping it avoid detection.

Matthew Katz, head of marketplace quality at FreeWheel, a Comcast-owned ad tech company that was partly involved in the investigation, says attackers in the space are becoming increasingly sophisticated. “Vastflux was an especially complicated scheme,” Katz says.

The attack involved some significant infrastructure and planning, the researchers say. Edwards says Vastflux used multiple domains to launch its attack. The name Vastflux is based on “[fast flux](#)”—an attack type hackers use that [involves linking multiple IP addresses to one domain name](#)—and [VAST](#), a template for video advertising, developed by a working group within the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB), that was abused in the attack. (Shailley Singh, executive vice president, product and chief operating officer at IAB Tech Lab, says using the [VAST 4 version](#) of its template can help prevent attacks like Vastflux, and other technical measures from publishers and ad networks would help reduce its effectiveness.) “It’s not the very simple kind of fraud scheme that we see all the time,” Habiby says.

The researchers refused to reveal who may be behind the Vastflux—or how much money they potentially made—citing ongoing investigations. However, they say they’ve seen the same criminals running advertising fraud [efforts as far back as 2020](#). In that instance, the ad fraud scheme was targeting US swing states and allegedly collecting users’ data.

For now, at least, Vastflux has been stopped. In June of last year, Human Security and [several companies it has partnered with](#) to take action against ad fraud began actively combating the group and the attack. Three separate disruptions of Vastflux took place during June and July 2022, dropping the number of ad requests from the attack to under a billion per day. “We identified the bad actors behind the operation and worked closely with abused organizations to mitigate the fraud,” the company said in a [blog post](#).

In December, the actors behind the attack took down the servers, and Human Security hasn’t seen any activity from the group since then. Tamer Hassan, the firm’s CEO, says there are multiple actions people can take against criminal actors, some of which may lead to law enforcement action. However, money matters. Stopping attackers from profiting will reduce the attacks. “Winning the economic game is how we win as an industry against cybercriminals,” Hassan says.

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HEADLINE	01/19 T-Mobile: hackers stole data 37M accounts
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/t-mobile-says-hackers-used-api-steal-data-37-million-accounts
GIST	<p>Wireless carrier T-Mobile on Thursday fessed up to another massive data breach affecting approximately 37 million current postpaid and prepaid customer accounts.</p> <p>In a filing with the Security and Exchange Commission (SEC), T-Mobile said that an unidentified malicious actor abused an API without authorization to access customer account data, including name, billing address, email, phone number, date of birth, T-Mobile account number and information such as the number of lines on the account and plan features.</p> <p>The telco provider said the data stolen did not include payment information, passwords or other sensitive data.</p> <p>T-Mobile said the data breach was detected on January 5 this year and was contained “within a day of learning of the malicious activity.”</p> <p>“Our investigation is still ongoing, but the malicious activity appears to be fully contained at this time, and there is currently no evidence that the bad actor was able to breach or compromise our systems or our network,” T-Mobile said.</p> <p>The company said its systems and policies prevented the most sensitive types of customer information from being accessed, and as a result, based on our investigation to date, customer accounts and finances were not put at risk directly by this event.</p> <p>From the 8-K filing:</p> <p>The API abused by the bad actor does not provide access to any customer payment card information (PCI), social security numbers/tax IDs, driver’s license or other government ID numbers, passwords/PINs or other financial account information, so none of this information was exposed.</p> <p>Rather, the impacted API is only able to provide a limited set of customer account data, including name, billing address, email, phone number, date of birth, T-Mobile account number and information such as the number of lines on the account and plan features. The preliminary result from our investigation indicates that the bad actor(s) obtained data from this API for approximately 37 million current postpaid and prepaid customer accounts, though many of these accounts did not include the full data set.</p> <p>We currently believe that the bad actor first retrieved data through the impacted API starting on or around November 25, 2022. We are continuing to diligently investigate the unauthorized activity. In addition, we have notified certain federal agencies about the incident, and we are concurrently working with law enforcement. Additionally, we have begun notifying customers whose information may have been obtained by the bad actor in accordance with applicable state and federal requirements.</p>

	<p>This isn't the first time T-Mobile has scrambled to contain a major data breach.</p> <p>Last year, the notorious Lapsus\$ cybercrime gang compromised T-Mobile systems in a hacking carnage that led to source code access and access to an internal customer account management tool, which could be used to conduct SIM swapping.</p> <p>T-Mobile has also disclosed data breaches affecting customer data in 2019 and 2020, and an incident that impacted more than 54 million customers in 2021. Last November, authorities in 40 U.S. states reached a settlement totaling more than \$16 million with Experian and T-Mobile over data breaches suffered by the companies in 2012 and 2015.</p> <p>According to the results of a survey released this week of more than 400 US-based professionals (more than 90% of whom were developers or security people), 53% claimed to have suffered an API breach, while 77% claimed their company was very or extremely effective in managing their tokens.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 Mexico schools hit by tranquilizer craze
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/2nd-mexican-school-hit-tranquilizer-craze-96546017
GIST	<p>MEXICO CITY -- The second school in as many days was hit Thursday by the mass ingestion of tranquilizer pills that may be linked to a social media "challenge."</p> <p>Mexico City police said eight students at a middle school had been treated by paramedics after swallowing a "controlled medication," and that three of them had been taken to a hospital.</p> <p>Police did not say what the drug was, but the term "controlled medication" in Mexico usually refers to pain killers, sedatives or psychotropic substances.</p> <p>None of the students were believed to be in any danger, but police and ambulances were still posted outside the No. 26 middle school in downtown Mexico City Thursday afternoon.</p> <p>Julio César Sánchez said his daughter, a ninth grader, told him that she knew of two students who had been affected after taking a "prohibited substance," but that school authorities had not yet informed parents what it was.</p> <p>The incident came one day after three students at another middle school near the northern city of Monterrey were treated for doses of clonazepam, a tranquilizer or sedative sometimes sold under the brand name Klonopin.</p> <p>Daniel Carrillo, the mayor of the Monterrey suburb of San Nicolás de los Garza, confirmed the incident. In his Twitter account, Carrillo wrote that "the first thing tomorrow they (the students) will continue under observation," and said he gave thanks "it wasn't any worse."</p> <p>The pills play a role in a social media trend known as the "clonazepam challenge," in which students compete to be "the last person to fall asleep." The pills can cause extreme drowsiness.</p> <p>Sánchez said there had been talk about social media challenges at his daughter's school.</p> <p>"Unfortunately, these things can lead kids to extremes," Sánchez said. "The freedom on social media can lead to good, or bad."</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 Ransomware revenue drops 40% in 2022
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/compliance/ransomware-revenue-drops-40-3-in-2022-as-victims-show-less-interest-in-paying-up

Researchers estimated that the total ransomware revenue dropped 40.3% in 2022, with several indicators signaling a drop in victims willing to pay or, perhaps, report payments.

According to a [Chainalysis report](#) released Thursday, total funds sent to known ransomware addresses globally fell from \$765.5 million in 2021 to \$456.8 million in 2022, with evidence suggesting that this huge drop is due to an increasing unwillingness on the part of victims to pay ransom demands rather than a decline in the actual number of attacks.

"Since 2019, victim payment rates have fallen from 76% to just 41%," the report noted. "One big factor is that paying ransoms has become legally riskier, especially following an [OFAC advisory](#) in September 2021 on the potential for sanctions violations when paying ransoms."

Indeed, governments' approach to dealing with ransomware response has continued to evolve.

In September 2021 OFAC advisory, the U.S. Treasury Department [warned](#) that it could take action against those who pay ransoms to entities on its sanctions list. In March 2022, Congress passed a legislation that requires [critical infrastructure entities](#) to report any ransom payments they make. Outside the U.S., the European Union has even tighter legislation on ransomware response, which allows member states to impose fines for paying ransoms under the Security of Network and Information Systems Directive.

According to Gartner, a technological research and consulting firm, the percentage of countries passing legislation to regulate ransomware payments fines will [rise](#) 30% by the end of 2025 from less than 1% in 2021.

However, despite the significant decline in ransomware revenue under tightening legislation over the past year, the implications of regulating ransomware payments are [still controversial](#). Some experts argued that this drop might also be due to victims' unwillingness to report their ransomware payments for fear of legal consequences.

"Ransomware has severe consequences for an organization's brand and reputation, which results in many, if not most, ransomware incidents and payments going unreported. That is, unfortunately, the most likely reason for the apparent decline," said Daren Guccione, CEO and Co-Founder at Keeper Security.

Apart from stricter government regulations, other factors could explain the drop in ransomware payments.

First, [cyber insurance](#) firms, which usually reimburse victims for ransomware payments, play an essential role in the decrease of ransomware payments.

"Cyber insurance has really taken the lead in tightening not only who they will insure, but also what insurance payments can be used for, so they are much less likely to allow their clients to use an insurance payout to pay a ransom," Allan Liska, intelligence analyst and ransomware expert at Recorded Future told Chainalysis.

Jason Rebholz, chief information security officer at Corvus Insurance, agreed with Liska and told SC Media that the tightened underwriting standards within the cyber insurance industry also play a critical role.

"In 2022, Corvus observed that only 32% of ransomware victims paid the ransom. This speaks less to the victim's willingness to pay and more to the increased investment in resilient backups. This takes the decision of whether they are forced to pay out of the equation. Thankfully, more organizations are positioning themselves to have backups available to restore operations without having to pay a ransom," Rebholz said.

	<p>In addition, the Russia-Ukraine war could also be contributing to a drop in ransomware revenue as tightening economic sanctions have made it harder for organizations to pay ransoms to Russian-originated actors.</p> <p>"With the advent of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in early 2022, many state governments, including the US's OFAC, instituted sanctions on Russia, and this included ransomware payments made to Russia-based attacker organizations," Jordan LaRose, practice director for infrastructure services at NCC Group, told SC Media.</p> <p>LaRose also said that deciding whether to pay an attacker is a risk-based decision under increasing regulations for ransomware payments and complicated political environments. "Both the awareness companies have, and the overall risk of making ransomware payments has increased exponentially in 2022 and continues to increase in 2023," he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 Attack hits 300 UK fast food restaurants
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/ransomware-attack-hits-nearly-300-fast-food-restaurants-in-uk-including-kfc-and-pizza-hut/
GIST	<p>A ransomware attack closed nearly 300 fast-food restaurants in the United Kingdom, according to a statement from Yum! Brands published late Wednesday evening.</p> <p>Yum! Brands, an American company which owns KFC, Pizza Hut and Taco Bell, stated "certain information technology systems" were impacted in the incident.</p> <p>Data was taken from the company's network, the statement confirmed. It added that the investigation is ongoing and that "at this stage, there is no evidence that customer databases were stolen."</p> <p>The company said it "initiated response protocols, including deploying containment measures such as taking certain systems offline and implementing enhanced monitoring technology."</p> <p>Third-party cybersecurity and forensics specialists have been brought in, and — although the impact was mainly felt in the corporation's British operations — Yum! said it had informed federal law enforcement in the United States.</p> <p>"Less than 300 restaurants in the United Kingdom were closed for one day, but all stores are now operational," the company stated, adding that it was "actively engaged in fully restoring affected systems, which is expected to be largely complete in the coming days."</p> <p>It is not clear when the actual incident took place nor how long it has taken Yum! in total to restore the affected systems.</p> <p>A spokesperson did not immediately respond to The Record when asked if Yum! had paid the ransom.</p> <p>"While this incident caused temporary disruption, the company is aware of no other restaurant disruptions and does not expect this event to have a material adverse impact on its business, operations or financial results," the statement added.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 Yum Brands: data stolen in attack
SOURCE	https://techcrunch.com/2023/01/19/taco-bell-kfc-owner-says-data-stolen-during-ransomware-attack/
GIST	<p>Yum Brands, the parent company of fast food chains KFC, Pizza Hut and Taco Bell, has confirmed that company data was stolen in a ransomware attack.</p> <p>TechCrunch first learned of an apparent incident affecting Yum Brands earlier this week, which the Kentucky-based company confirmed in a statement on Thursday.</p>

	<p>Yum Brands said a ransomware attack impacted “certain information technology systems,” prompting the chain to take some of its systems offline. The incident also led to the closure of roughly 300 restaurants in the United Kingdom for 24 hours, the company said.</p> <p>Although the ransomware attack largely affected the company’s U.K. operations, Yum Brands said it notified U.S. federal law enforcement as its investigation continues.</p> <p>Yum Brands said that the unidentified intruder responsible for the ransomware attack stole data from the company’s network, but added it had “no evidence” that customer data was stolen. It’s not clear if the company has the technical means, such as logs, to determine what specific data was exfiltrated.</p> <p>It’s also unclear when the ransomware attack began or how the company’s systems were initially compromised. Yum Brands spokesperson Rob Poetsch declined to provide more details about the incident, referring TechCrunch to the company’s statement.</p> <p>“While this incident caused temporary disruption, the company is aware of no other restaurant disruptions and does not expect this event to have a material adverse impact on its business, operations or financial results,” the company’s statement said.</p>
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Terrorism, Extremism

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HEADLINE	01/19 Atlanta: 7 protesters ‘domestic terrorism’
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/19/us/atlanta-cop-city-shooting-domestic-terrorism-charges/index.html
GIST	<p>Seven people were arrested and charged with domestic terrorism following the fatal shooting of one person and the shooting of a Georgia state trooper near a proposed Atlanta police training facility, according to the Georgia Bureau of Investigation.</p> <p>Opponents of the project – a \$90 million, 85-acre planned facility dubbed “Cop City” by activists – had been camped out for months in the forest in an attempt to stop construction. When law enforcement began an operation to remove people from the area Wednesday morning, gunfire was exchanged, GBI Director Mike Register said.</p> <p>Law enforcement and opponents of the project have given differing details on what happened, with Register saying law enforcement personnel “returned fire in self-defense,” after someone “without warning shot a Georgia State Patrol Trooper.”</p> <p>“The individual who fired upon law enforcement and shot the trooper was killed in an exchange of gunfire,” Register said.</p> <p>In a later news release, the GBI said officers “located a man inside a tent in the woods” at about 9 a.m.</p> <p>“Officers gave verbal commands to the man who did not comply and shot a Georgia State Patrol Trooper. Other law enforcement officers returned fire, hitting the man. Law enforcement evacuated the Trooper to a safe area,” the updated release said.</p> <p>Kei Diliza, a resident of nearby Gresham Park who is affiliated with the local movement “Stop Cop City,” told CNN on Wednesday that reports from other members who were near the site conflicted the account that law enforcement gave regarding a protester shooting at them.</p> <p>Wednesday’s law enforcement operation allegedly began “with numerous armed police shutting down a public road and pointing guns into the park,” “Stop Cop City” said in an emailed statement to CNN.</p>

“Community members have been demanding police end brutal tactics against forest defenders for months. Just on Monday, over one hundred neighbors and organizers gathered at the DeKalb County Courthouse to demand an end to police repression of the movement to stop cop city,” the statement said.

Some 25 campsites were removed from the site during the clearing operation, the agency said in a release. Weapons including “mortar style fireworks, multiple edged weapons, pellet rifles, gas masks, and a blow torch” were recovered.

The seven arrested were all from states other than Georgia.

Contentious debate over development

The proposed facility has been the site of violent incidents in the past. [Five people were arrested](#) last year and charged with domestic terrorism after activists and protestors clashed over development of the site.

In May, eight protesters were arrested after a Molotov cocktail was thrown at police as authorities tried to remove them from the area, according to [CNN affiliate WSB](#). And last month, five people were arrested and charged with domestic terrorism after police tried to remove barricades at the entrances to the area.

The Atlanta Police Foundation has said the center is needed to help boost morale and recruitment efforts, and previous facilities used by law enforcement are substandard.

The facility will include a shooting range, mock city and burn building.

Some opponents see it as a response to the [2020 protests](#) sparked by the deaths of Black people while in police custody, while others have concerns about the project’s environmental impact and some say the project, which will cost taxpayers about \$30 million, has been a largely secretive development with scarce community input.

In Wednesday’s news conference, Register said that amid nationwide conversations about reforming police forces, building a new center that would “train police officers to be effective in engaging in the community is a great thing for the community.”

The person who died Wednesday has been identified as Manuel Esteban Paez Teran, 26, according to the GBI.

Activists associated with a group protesting the site said Teran was a “Forest Defender,” working to fight environmental racism. Local justice groups released a joint statement saying Teran, known as Tortuguita and who identifies as nonbinary, was a “sweet, warm, very smart and caring” person.

The man died on scene, according to the release. A handgun and shell casings were recovered from the scene, the GBI said.

The wounded trooper was transported to Grady Memorial Hospital for treatment, and according to the Georgia Department of Public Safety, was in stable condition Thursday.

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HEADLINE	01/19 US captures global ISIS recruiter in Syria
SOURCE	https://news.yahoo.com/us-forces-capture-global-isis-184040652.html
GIST	<p>U.S. and coalition forces carried out a helicopter assault on an ISIS stronghold in Syria on Thursday, capturing a one extremist involved in global recruiting for the terrorist organization.</p> <p>U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) carried out the operation on Wednesday in partnership with the Syrian Democratif Forces (SDF). The ISIS operative, who the military did not name, was involved in planning multiple ISIS operations and also served as a global recruiter.</p>

	<p>"The capture of this ISIS operative will disrupt the terrorist organization's threatening U.S. citizens, our partners and innocent civilians," said Col. Joe Buccino, CENTCOM spokesperson.</p> <p>"ISIS continues to represent a threat to the U.S. and partners in the region. CENTCOM maintains a sufficient and sustainable presence in the region and will continue to counter threats against regional security," he added.</p> <p>U.S. forces in Syria frequently work alongside SDF forces for operations in the country. CENTCOM says no civilians were killed or injured in Wednesday's assault, according to an initial assessment. No U.S. or allies forces were injured either.</p> <p>Another U.S. helicopter raid in eastern Syria killed two ISIS militants in early December. U.S. forces also captured six ISIS militants in a series of operations the week of December 20. CENTCOM identified one of the men as al-Zubaydi, whom they identified as a senior provincial officer for ISIS.</p> <p>The U.S. has been fighting ISIS in Syria since 2015 and continues to maintain a presence in the country with roughly 900 soldiers stationed there.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/20 Al-Shabab militants attack Somali base
SOURCE	https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2023-01-20/somalias-al-shabaab-attacks-base-in-town-it-had-lost-kills-seven
GIST	<p>MOGADISHU (Reuters) - Islamist al Shabaab militants on Friday killed at least seven soldiers at a Somali military base in a town re-captured by the government, the information ministry and militant group said.</p> <p>The attack was eventually repelled, an officer at the base in the central Somali town of Galcad told Reuters. He said the dead included the base's deputy commander, who was part of a U.S.-trained unit stationed there.</p> <p>The attack underscores the formidable threat al Shabaab poses for Somalia's military, even after a government offensive launched last year scored significant success against the al Qaeda-allied militants.</p> <p>Al Shabaab fighters stormed the Galcad base early on Friday, exploding car bombs and firing their weapons, Captain Issa Abdullahi said.</p> <p>The base is run by Danab, a unit of U.S.-trained commandos who have participated in the offensive against the militants.</p> <p>Somalia's information ministry said in a statement that in addition to al Shabaab killing seven soldiers, their soldiers had killed 100 of the group's fighters and destroyed five gun-mounted pick-up vehicles known as technicals.</p> <p>In a statement al Shabaab said it had "miraculously overrun the U.S.-trained forces" in the town and killed scores of soldiers.</p> <p>The government and al Shabaab often give different casualty numbers from the same attack.</p> <p>The group has been fighting since 2006 to topple the country's central government and install its own rule, based on a strict interpretation of Islam.</p> <p>Drones deployed to help reinforce the military carried out bombings against the militants and chased them out of the town, Abdullahi said.</p>

	<p>Government forces just this week seized Galcad and the port town of Harardhere in Somalia's Galmudug region from al Shabaab control, a major success for the ongoing government offensive.</p> <p>Galcad resident Abdullahi Nur told Reuters he heard huge blasts at the base, followed by heavy fighting and air strikes early on Friday.</p> <p>"We have been celebrating the liberation of the town but it is now covered with smoke. May God save us," he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 Canada to repatriate 19 from ISIS camps
SOURCE	https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canada-repatriating-syria-1.6719544
GIST	<p>The federal government is moving forward on repatriating 19 Canadian women and children held in northeastern Syria, says their lawyer.</p> <p>Family members of 23 detained Canadians — six women, four men and 13 children — have asked a Federal Court to order the government to arrange for their return. They've argued that refusing to do so would violate their charter rights.</p> <p>The Canadians are among many foreign nationals in Syrian detention camps for suspected ISIS members and their families. The camps are run by the Kurdish forces that reclaimed the war-torn region from the extremist group.</p> <p>Lawrence Greenspon, the lawyer for the applicants, told CBC that an agreement has been reached to secure the release and return of the women and children. The case of the four men is still before the court, he said.</p> <p>"It's clear that the Canadian government has the ability to bring our Canadians home, and where there is evidence to believe they've committed an offence, charge them and prosecute them," Greenspon told CBC's <i>Canada Tonight</i> host Dwight Drummond.</p> <p>Decision 'long past due,' expert says</p> <p>A document filed in the court case in December said Global Affairs Canada already had begun looking into repatriating the 19 Canadians. The document stated that they had met the threshold under the government's January 2021 policy framework for providing extraordinary assistance.</p> <p>The names of the women and children have not been disclosed.</p> <p>Leah West, a national security expert and professor at Carleton University, said the decision is "long past due." She said Canada has been pressed by allies and international advocacy groups to repatriate Canadian women and children from Syria.</p> <p>"I think [with] all that pressure mounting, we were going to see the women and children come home," West said.</p> <p>A handful of women and children have returned to Canada from the region in recent years, including two women who were arrested upon their arrival — one on terrorism charges.</p> <p>But for the most part, Canada has not followed the example of other countries — including France and Australia — that have successfully repatriated citizens.</p> <p>Treat children 'as victims,' says human rights group</p> <p>Farida Deif, director of Human Rights Watch in Canada, said Canada has been hesitant because it lacked "political will to repatriate anyone with suspected ISIS ties."</p>

	<p>Deif said her organization estimates there are still dozens of Canadians in Syrian camps, most of them children.</p> <p>"There needs to be steps taken to ensure that the children are treated first and foremost as victims," Deif said. "They've ... suffered unimaginable harm already."</p> <p>Both West and Deif said they would support the repatriation of the Canadian men held in the detention camps so they can face trial in Canada.</p> <p>But former CSIS analyst Phil Gurski told CBC News Network that he doubts any of the adults returning would face justice for potential crimes they may have committed.</p> <p>"The witnesses aren't here, the evidence isn't here," he told host Natasha Fatah. "As a Canadian citizen I'm outraged that people are going to get away with it."</p> <p>Gurski said it would also put extra pressure on Canada's intelligence bodies to monitor the individuals that do return.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 FBI warns utilities of neo-Nazi plots
SOURCE	https://www.opb.org/article/2023/01/19/surge-in-oregon-washington-substation-attacks-as-fbi-warns-neo-nazi-plots/
GIST	<p>A white pickup truck with a rack of roof lights blazing pulled up to an electrical substation in the small town of Morton, Washington, about 70 miles south of Seattle on June 16. In the predawn dark next to the city cemetery, a man in a dark hoodie and baseball cap hopped out of the truck. He broke a steel gate apart, likely with a crowbar later found at the scene, and walked inside the fenced facility on his way to sabotaging its high-voltage transformers.</p> <p>Electrical substations transform high-voltage electricity to the lower voltages that keep America's lights on, its food cold, its medical devices operating and its phones charged. Far-flung substations can be difficult to secure. Damaging even a single one can shut off critical services to thousands of people.</p> <p>Attacks like the one in Morton are on the rise in the Northwest – there have been 15 since June, more than in the previous six years combined. The recent attacks make this region a hotspot for such activity, according to a joint investigation by Oregon Public Broadcasting and KUOW. In most cases, the motives aren't known. But as the FBI and extremism researchers have noted, neo-Nazis have been calling for just such attacks.</p> <p>"The individuals of concern believe that an attack on electrical infrastructure will contribute to their ideological goal of causing societal collapse and a subsequent race war in the United States," according to an FBI memo obtained by OPB and KUOW.</p> <p>The substation in Morton that was attacked in June is connected to transmission lines that deliver hydropower from the Cowlitz Falls Dam. The energy coursing through those lines is more than 500 times the voltage that comes out of your light sockets or power outlets and, experts say, is easily lethal to anyone foolish enough to mess around with it.</p> <p>Despite the danger, the Morton substation intruder entered the facility and deliberately damaged equipment. (To avoid inspiring copycat crimes, OPB and KUOW are omitting details of techniques used in this attack and others.)</p> <p>"I saw a white flash through the garage door window," one eyewitness across the street told Morton Police. "The power cut off."</p>

The 4 a.m. incident plunged about 7,500 customers, or most of the eastern half of rural Lewis County, into darkness for several hours, according to police.

The intruder climbed back into the passenger seat of the truck, which sped off to the north, according to another eyewitness.

The incursion kicked off a rash of attacks on the Northwest power grid in 2022, according to public records obtained by OPB and KUOW. It is unclear whether most of the attacks are connected.

As with most of them, no one has been arrested, and no one has claimed responsibility.

A rash of attacks

Pacific Northwest utilities have reported a surge of attacks to the FBI in recent months. Attacks on substations in Oregon and Washington predate a December attack in Moore County, North Carolina, that left at least 40,000 people without power for days.

In some cases, the attacks appear to follow manuals disseminated online by neo-Nazis and other far-right extremists.

For years, law enforcement and academics have warned about plots on the nation's electrical grid from "accelerationist" groups that advocate, however implausibly, that taking down the grid will hasten the demise of the federal government and start a race war.

A Nov. 22 alert from FBI headquarters and the agency's Newark field office warned of an increase of "threats to electrical infrastructure" from racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists ("RMVE"). Those would include white supremacists and other so-called accelerationists attempting to sow chaos.

"The FBI has received reports of threats to electrical infrastructure by threat actors who espouse RMVE ideology to create civil disorder and inspire further violence," the FBI warning noted.

Weeks later, a second bulletin sent by the FBI's Portland field office reported specific attacks were carried out in Oregon and Washington. The attacks were carried out using firearms, hand tools, flames and chains "possibly in response to an online call for attacks on critical infrastructure," according to the bulletin dated Dec. 2.

"In recent attacks, criminal actors bypassed security fences by cutting the fence links, lighting nearby fires, [and] shooting equipment from a distance," the bulletin stated. "No theft was reported in either case, making it apparent that the intent was likely to disable electrical systems and not for monetary profit."

A spokesperson for the FBI declined to comment on the bulletins obtained by OPB and KUOW but said people should report suspicious activity near substations to law enforcement.

Neo-Nazis plot to take down the grid

Plots by white supremacists to target electrical infrastructure in the United States have increased dramatically since 2016, [according to a report published by the Program on Extremism at The George Washington University](#) in September.

"The rise of accelerationist ideology and doctrine during the past decade likely fueled the increased risk of attack plots within white supremacist milieus targeting critical infrastructure, and the energy sector in particular," according to the report.

The U.S. Department of Justice has charged six individuals with a "discernible, tangible connection" to neo-Nazi groups such as Atomwaffen Division and The Base with plots to destroy power lines, even a nuclear reactor, the report states.

Other white-supremacist plots have threatened electrical infrastructure in the Pacific Northwest.

In 2020 and 2021, federal prosecutors charged five neo-Nazis in connection with conspiracy to damage an energy facility. According to court documents filed by the government, one of the defendants carried a handwritten list of about a dozen locations in Idaho and surrounding states, each housing “a transformer, substation, or other component of the power grid for the Northwest United States, that if destroyed could cause damage” to the grid.

The goal, federal prosecutors stated, was “to attack the power grid both for the purpose of creating general chaos and to provide cover and ease of escape in those areas in which they planned to undertake assassinations and other desired operations to further their goal of creating a white ethno-state.”

Finally, in 2022, three white supremacists from Wisconsin, Ohio and Texas pleaded guilty to conspiring to provide material support to terrorists. According to the Justice Department, each defendant agreed to take down substations in a different area of the country using high-powered rifles. They believed it could bring about unrest, financial ruin and even a race war, according to prosecutors.

Even though the motives behind most of the 2022 attacks are unclear, the history of white supremacists’ focus on the electrical grid has troubled law enforcement and extremist researchers.

“We’re in a real wave of domestic extremist violence right now that’s been increasing for several years,” said Mary McCord, a former acting attorney general for national security at the Department of Justice and is now a professor at Georgetown Law School.

In many cases it doesn’t matter to extremist groups who actually carries out the attacks, McCord said, because just the fact that the attacks are happening contributes to their goal of sowing discord.

“People might not know whether a particular attack on a power station or a power grid was part of an ideologically motivated plot, or was just done for criminal purposes,” McCord said. “White supremacists and others who are seeking to advance their own causes for ideological reasons can use that to advance their purported goals of causing chaos, undermining the government, undermining general stability.”

Joshua Fisher-Birch, a researcher with the Counter Extremism Project, a nonprofit that tracks extremists groups’ online activities, said the attacks in North Carolina and those in the Northwest have energized some on the far right.

“The recent substation attacks have been spoken about in glowing terms by certain members of the extreme right, particularly by neo-Nazi accelerationists and white supremacist accelerationists who subscribe to this ideology where they want to push chaos,” Fisher-Birch said.

Far-right forums online provide instruction manuals for how to attack substations and other critical infrastructure.

The design of the manuals invokes a video game and taps into costume-play subculture, according to Eric Ward, senior advisor at Western States Center, a Portland-based civil rights group that advocates against extremism.

“White nationalists have tapped into gaming and ‘cos-play’ in order to convince individuals that what they’re engaging in is nothing more than play and gaming,” Ward said. “It downplays the real consequences.”

The manuals plant dangerous ideas that can cause widespread harm and both those engaging in attacks and the websites allowing the manuals to proliferate should be held accountable, Ward said.

“For some people losing power isn’t just an inconvenience,” Ward said. “If you’re on a breathing machine, if you need to refrigerate your insulin, access to electricity is a matter of life and death.”

Ward said by attacking the electrical grid, neo-Nazi groups want to show the “federal government is incapable of protecting itself and the American public.” Their goal, he said, is to erode the public’s trust in government.

Despite an uptick in grid attacks by unknown actors, most accelerationist activity remains online, according to Ross Johnson, a grid-security consultant on Canada’s Vancouver Island.

“We have accelerationists in the United States, they’re in Canada, and they’re in Europe,” he said. “We don’t see them very often. A lot of it is just talk, thankfully.”

“I think their logic is very twisted,” Johnson said.

A national hotspot

Using utility sources, police reports, and a U.S. Department of Energy database of disturbances to the electrical grid, Oregon Public Broadcasting and KUOW confirmed a wave of 15 physical attacks on substations in the Pacific Northwest since June.

The incidents accelerated toward year’s end, with 10 of 15 attacks in 2022 taking place in November and December. (The tally for previous years includes incidents listed in the federal database as physical attacks, vandalism, suspicious activity, or sabotage. With local information sources, we confirmed that all 15 incidents in 2022 involved actual physical attacks on substations.)

The federal data also shows the West to be the hotspot for intentional damage to electrical infrastructure. The western grid, serving 11 western states and the provinces of British Columbia and Alberta, has had more vandalism, sabotage, and physical attacks reported in the first eight months of 2022 than the rest of North America combined.

“Attacks on electric infrastructure are serious crimes and need to be treated as such,” Puesh Kumar, head of the U.S. Department of Energy’s Office of Cybersecurity, Energy Security and Emergency Response, said in an email. “We are asking the public—if you see something, say something—and encouraging utilities across the country to share information with law enforcement regarding any suspicious activities.”

Washington substations suffered a spate of attacks last summer and fall, starting in the southwestern part of the state. Three sites in the Grays Harbor area were targeted in June, August and October, according to local utility officials. A substation in the Washington town of Toledo, 71 miles north of Portland, was hit in August.

November brought a flurry of attacks: two in Woodland, Washington, then two more at Puget Sound Energy sites in Pierce and Thurston counties, which the utility has declined to identify more specifically.

Two substations in Clackamas County, just southeast of Portland, were attacked on Nov. 24 and Nov. 28.

Two intruders “cut into the fence and used firearms to shoot up and disable numerous pieces of equipment and cause significant damage,” according to an email from a Bonneville Power Administration security official to police departments in the area.

Petty vandalism and attempts to steal copper are nothing new for electric utilities.

“But now we are dealing with quickly escalating incidents of sabotage,” the security official wrote.

Several of the Northwest attacks incorporated a similar technique for knocking out power documented by police at the Morton substation in June.

At least two of the 15 attacks in the Northwest also involved firearms, though officials have divulged few details.

Christmas attacks

Federal prosecutors say the four most recent attacks, on Christmas day in Pierce County, Washington, were carried out by two men who demonstrated no ideological motive, only a desire to knock power out so they could commit burglaries at local businesses. According to federal charging documents for Matthew Greenwood and Jeremy Crahan of Puyallup, Washington, Greenwood confessed to the four attacks and told the FBI he and Crahan had gone to an unnamed local business during the blackout, drilled its door lock, and stolen from its cash register.

The Pierce County Sheriff's Office reports several burglaries Christmas morning, with one business in the blackout area, the Thai Bangkok restaurant, having its door lock drilled and about \$100 taken from its cash register.

"The recklessness and the lack of judgment that is displayed in order just to commit some burglaries by putting the power out in four separate locations, it's just beyond words," federal judge J. Richard Creatura said at a detention hearing for Greenwood in January in Tacoma. Both defendants remain in custody.

Federal prosecutors said in court they found no evidence the men had motives beyond burglary, though they told the judge they had not yet searched the men's phones for evidence of extremist ties.

"Despite the arrests that occurred in Tacoma, we have not slowed down our efforts to further harden our substations and protect them in a physical manner," Bonneville Power Administration spokesperson Doug Johnson said. "The arrests are encouraging, but we believe that the threat still exists."

Keeping the lights on

Protecting a vast network against intentional attack is, depending who you talk to, costly or impossible. Some 700,000 miles of transmission lines crisscross the continent, with more than 50,000 substations punctuating the grid in urban, suburban, and rural locations.

North America's far-flung power grid is currently fragile enough that it doesn't take a sophisticated plot to quickly knock out power to thousands of people. The Tacoma area's Christmas day attackers, in their apparent quest to rob a Thai restaurant and other businesses, managed to quickly do \$3 million in damage to two substations that will take three years to repair, according to federal prosecutors.

The attackers also managed, perhaps by sheer luck, not to kill themselves.

"It really is amazing to me that there hasn't been a fatality for one of these vandals or thieves or whoever attempts to gain entry to a substation without the proper training," said Ian Cope with the Grays Harbor Public Utility District, the target of three substation attacks in 2022. "For someone to seek entry to a substation and attempt to do damage is incredibly dangerous."

The rash of attacks since November has forced conversations about additional security.

"We are making more investments and hardening the measures that we take to secure our substations and power lines," said Johnson, with the Bonneville Power Administration. "There will be further discussions across the board for electric utilities with regard to what we can do to protect electrical service and keep it reliable."

Proposed measures to protect the grid and keep America's lights on range from coats of armor to artificial intelligence.

The Idaho National Laboratory has developed a bulletproof armor that can fit over transformers like a military-grade steel hood.

Others pitch higher-tech forms of surveillance as a more affordable form of security.

	<p>“It used to be that the cost of monitoring was really expensive because you had to get a signal or signals back to the monitoring center, and then you had to pay somebody to sit there and look at them,” security consultant Ross Johnson said.</p> <p>Now, in tandem with ever-cheaper video cameras, artificial-intelligence programs can scan many video streams at once for anything unusual — say, a human, ladder, or bolt cutter where it shouldn’t be – and alert humans to the potential problem.</p> <p>“I’m very optimistic about the future of substation security,” Johnson said.</p> <p>Utilities are required to have measures in place on their most critical assets to prevent cascading or uncontrolled power outages. Utility industry officials say the recent grid attacks in the Northwest and North Carolina hit smaller substations that were unlikely to lead to any cascading outages and were not required to have defensive measures in place.</p> <p>Shortly after the North Carolina attack, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, which regulates the interstate transmission of electricity, launched a 4-month study aimed at determining whether physical security measures should be mandated at all power plants, substations, and control centers nationwide.</p> <p>How much any additional security measures would boost the cost of powering America’s lights, appliances and vehicles remains unclear.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/20 Treasure hunters search for IS lost loot
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/20/treasure-hunters-circle-in-search-of-islamic-states-lost-loot
GIST	<p>One evening three years ago, Ayad, a former Iraqi army officer, took a call from a contact who not long before had been a mortal foe. The man on the phone was a shepherd from a town that had been a stronghold of the Islamic State terror group, and he had some information to share.</p> <p>For years, the shepherd had been an IS member, a resident of the hardline town of Baaj who had been swept up in the marauders’ 2014 rampage across northern Iraq and in the blood-soaked bedlam that followed. Tending his flock had given him a unique vantage point on the extremists as they consolidated a stranglehold on Mosul province, and then, when the region slipped from their grasp, as the resurgent national army and global coalition fought back.</p> <p>The shepherd was now sitting on one of the biggest secrets of them all: where the fleeing terror group had stashed its loot. He knew of one particular site where IS fighters had buried at least \$3m (about £2.5m). If Ayad could dig it up, he and his new friend could share in the spoils. The shepherd had contacted Ayad because he felt the former army officer had the connections to pull off the job.</p> <p>“And then I made a big mistake,” said Ayad, recounting the story in a mountaintop cafe in northern Iraq. “I called my cousin who worked in the intelligence service, and who could get there easier than I could, and asked him to retrieve it. He said he would.”</p> <p>The decision Ayad was faced with is one of many similar reckonings made in the years since IS was defeated on the battlefields of Iraq and Syria, where the most chaotic period in the Middle East’s recent history is slowly giving up its secrets.</p> <p>From under the deserts of both countries and amid the ruins of their cities, a vast array of treasure is slowly being recovered, often by the most unlikely of consortiums. Once-impossible alliances of former foes have been formed to retrieve some IS treasure, while once-tight family networks have been shredded in the same pursuit.</p> <p>From islands in the Euphrates, under wells in Anbar province, in the sewers of Mosul’s old city, and under nondescript homes across Nineveh, the treasure of the “caliphate” is emerging, its location pieced together</p>

by a small network of people patiently waiting for an opportunity to seize vast amounts of bullion, dollars and jewels that IS had assembled into a makeshift treasury.

Just what, and how much, was buried as vanquished IS members fled is unknown. But the sums recovered so far offer an irresistible lure to a growing number of officials and treasure hunters.

“This isn’t a myth,” said one former IS member, now in Syria. “But there are only a few people left alive who know where some of these stockpiles are.”

In some cases, IS prisoners and avaricious guards have made faustian bargains of freedom in return for riches. And in others, militias, army units, tribes and spies have been involved in a years-long standoff near a suspected hiding spot, with no one prepared to share in the spoils and all willing to bide their time, hoping a competitor looks away, or loses interest.

Former IS members, such as the shepherd, are now a prized asset. “He was only Isis because he had to accept the reality,” said Ayad of the herder who had pointed him to an underground bonanza. “He wanted a cut too. The spoils of war are fair game.”

Ayad’s cousin took two men with him to Baaj in late 2019. He followed directions exactly as they were relayed to him. “I told him to walk to the end of an irrigation pipe, then turn right a few metres and start digging. He did, and he found a blue plastic pickles barrel with a mesh top. He called me and asked what to do. I’m an explosives expert and told him it could be booby trapped. So they cut the barrel instead and the money was all there in bags, wrapped tightly.”

Of all Iraq’s possible treasure sites, say police officers, IS prisoners and intelligence officers, Mosul’s old city offers the most potential. Even with the city now being rebuilt, and the Great Mosque of al-Nuri, from where the now dead IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi proclaimed a so-called caliphate in mid-2014, nearly fully reconstructed, rubble is still yielding surprises.

Two years ago, a senior Iraqi police officer recovered a bag containing \$1.5m from one ruined home. “I counted it out and decided to give it to the government,” said the officer, a veteran of the fight against IS for the city. “I thought it was my duty. Do you know what they said to me? ‘Where’s the rest of it?’ Rather than get thanks from them, I got suspicion and trouble. I wish I didn’t give that money to them, and next time I won’t.”

The officer pointed to his five war wounds, three bullets and two shrapnel scars. “What has the state given us for our sacrifices? Not much,” he said.

Near his office in the old city are two suspected treasure sites, both known to all the security forces that control the town. “There’s one near a Unesco house and another nearby,” he said. “No one dares take them, because there are cameras nearby. And no one could agree on who gets what.”

In November, the Guardian visited one of the sites and found a freshly dug hole in the ground of a basement floor. “I dug a hole where I was told and all I found was a bag carrying explosives and shit,” said one of the men present. “There was something there, but it had been taken.”

Further west, towards the Syrian border, Shia militias have also been hunting treasure. Prisoners in their custody had suggested that some of the bigger hauls of cash and bullion had been buried in fridges under the soil near the Syrian border town of al-Qaim. “We can’t find it,” said one of the militia members. “But it’s out there somewhere.”

To the south of al-Qaim, a confirmed stockpile of gold and dollars totalling around \$16m has laid untouched under a well since it was buried in late 2018. Shia militias, tribesmen, IS, and Iraqi officials are aware of its location, but none dare extract it without other groups knowing, for fear of facing the wrath of their rivals.

	<p>“Everyone has had a look at this for a long time,” said a source in close proximity to the leadership of Lebanese Hezbollah in Iraq. “If one group tried to take it, the others would kill them. You could probably take it from the well, but getting it from there to safety is impossible. The American army would need to reinvade.</p> <p>In Erbil, to the north, a Kurdish intelligence officer admitted that his organisation had little idea which of its IS prisoners had information about treasure. “What we do know is they are low on cash and low on options,” he said. “They are back to basic smuggling and stand-over tactics. They can’t tax anyone any more.”</p> <p>When Ayad’s cousin returned from his treasure hunt in Baaj, he had some bad news. “He told me there was nothing in the boxes, and the mission failed,” Ayad said. “I didn’t believe him. Later his wife told me she had seen all the money laid out in their home. There was \$3m total. He bought four new villas after that. And he still tells me they found nothing.” The shepherd also went empty-handed.</p> <p>“It was the biggest regret of my life to trust [my cousin] with that,” Ayad added. “I know there’s a lot more treasure out there, but that’s the only one I knew of. I was an officer in the Iraqi army when Mosul fell. I went back to fight Isis with the National Defence. We have all paid a big price to rebuild this country. But the biggest price I paid was at the hands of my family.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 Covid outbreak at Guantanamo Bay
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/19/us/politics/coronavirus-outbreak-guantanamo.html
GIST	<p>Commanders at the prison at Guantánamo Bay abruptly canceled all legal meetings this week after at least two prisoners contracted the coronavirus, among them Abu Zubaydah, the first prisoner to be waterboarded by the C.I.A. in the war on terrorism, according to legal staff members.</p> <p>Lawyers for prisoners accused of plotting terrorist attacks, including Sept. 11 and the 2002 Bali bombing, reached the island on Saturday on the first military commissions flight of 2023. Some managed to see their clients before the prison halted meetings on Wednesday morning, without explanation.</p> <p>Military spokesmen did not respond to questions about the outbreak. But people with knowledge of operations said Abu Zubaydah, 51, whose real name is Zayn al-Abidin Muhammed Husayn, had become ill with the virus in the maximum-security prison called Camp 5.</p> <p>None of the legal staff members agreed to be identified because of the classified nature of Camp 5. Since 2021, it has housed 13 prisoners who were previously held by the C.I.A., including the alleged mastermind of the Sept. 11 attacks, Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, and detainees who have never been charged, including Abu Zubaydah.</p> <p>Several prisoners in Camp 5 have serious health issues, among them Abd al-Hadi al-Iraqi, a former commander of insurgents in wartime Afghanistan who was scheduled to meet with his lawyers for the first time since he underwent emergency spine surgery in November. Mr. Hadi, who says his true name is Nashwan al Tamir, is in his 60s. He pleaded guilty in a war crimes case last year, and has a pre-sentencing hearing scheduled for Feb. 13.</p> <p>It was not immediately known what measures the prison took to safeguard the other men on the prisoner’s cellblock.</p> <p>Abu Zubaydah was the original captive in the secret C.I.A. prison network that the Bush administration set up after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. He was waterboarded 83 times and has been held for more than 20 years without charge.</p> <p>U.S. intelligence mistakenly profiled him as a top leader of Al Qaeda after his capture in Pakistan in 2002, and psychologists on contract to the C.I.A. created a torture program to question him with “enhanced</p>

interrogation techniques” that would be used on other “high-value detainees” in the agency’s secret overseas prison network.

His lawyer, Lt. Col. Chantell M. Higgins, declined to comment on Thursday. James R. Hodes, the lead lawyer for an Indonesian prisoner known as [Hambali](#), said the prison was wrong to cancel all legal meetings. Mr. Hodes said that he and Mr. Hambali were fully vaccinated, and that he traveled to the base this week for his first meeting with the client this year and tested negative on arrival.

“We’ve all been vaccinated over and over,” Mr. Hodes said. “We all tested negative over and over. We make the time commitment and the effort to come down here because they decided to put a trial down here.”

“If you and I went into a federal prison or jail, we’d be able to see our clients because they’d be separated by glass,” he said. “Why can’t they make some accommodation?”

The other detainee who caught the virus was among the [20 general population prisoners](#) in the adjacent Camp 6, but it was not possible to determine his identity. None face war crimes charges and all have been approved for repatriation or resettlement in another country, if U.S. diplomats can reach safe-transfer agreements.

Although there have been periodic reports of detainees coming down with the coronavirus, none have died from it. The U.S. Southern Command, which runs the prison, said in April 2021 that all but eight detainees at the prison [had received a dose of the Covid vaccine](#), then stopped responding to questions about how many were fully vaccinated.

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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	01/20 Newberry Volcano unappreciated giant
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/emergency-preparedness/newberry-volcano-is-an-impressive-but-unappreciated-giant/
GIST	<p>Newberry Volcano is one of the largest and most hazardous active volcanoes in the United States. It is designated a “very high threat” volcano in a recent assessment by the U.S. Geological Survey, like Mauna Loa and Kilauea. It has been active for more than 530,000 years, most recently 1,300 years ago.</p> <p>Lava flows erupted at Newberry cover an area larger than Rhode Island. Powerful explosive eruptions sent volcanic ash into Idaho and the San Francisco Bay Area. A deep caldera indents its summit, hosting a flow of obsidian and thick beds of explosive pumice.</p> <p>Do you know where Newberry Volcano is?</p> <p>Newberry is southeast of Bend, Oregon, and in fact basalt flows and cinder cones in Bend are part of the volcano. Most visitors to the booming city head west to ski at Mount Bachelor or hike in the Three Sisters area, a clustering of volcanoes in the Cascade Range. They may not notice Newberry, because of its broad shape unlike most steep Cascade volcanoes, although it stands 1.3 km (4270 ft) above its surroundings.</p> <p>A recently completed, exhaustive study of Newberry by USGS geologist Julie Donnelly-Nolan and her colleagues shows that Newberry should be considered an eastern bulge of the Cascades volcanic arc. Its position 60 km east of the Cascade axis enables sweeping views of the volcanic range from the top of Paulina Peak, 2434 m (7984 ft) high, on the south rim of the caldera.</p> <p>From the summit on an exceptionally clear day, you can see from Mount Adams in southern Washington to Mount Shasta in northern California, a reach of nearly 500 km (310 miles). More than 500 m (1640 ft)</p>

below Paulina Peak lies the beautiful caldera with its two lakes and the geologic wonder of the Big Obsidian Flow. Then you can drive into the caldera to see these features up close.

A wide range of volcanic rocks characterizes Newberry. One important rock type is basalt, complete with extensive lava tubes and cinder cones familiar to us in Hawai`i. Basaltic [andesite](#), similar to basalt but richer in [silica](#), is more common, as in the Cascades volcanoes farther west, and Donnelly-Nolan mapped hundreds of basalt and [basaltic andesite](#) vents on the [edifice](#). [Dacite](#) and [rhyolite](#), still richer in silica and potentially very explosive but very rare in Hawai`i, complete the rock types. The Big Obsidian Flow has a rhyolite composition.

Newberry Volcano formed at the western end of the High Lava Plains, a broad volcanic region of basalt and rhyolite in southeastern Oregon that forms the northern sub-province of the extensional Basin and Range Province, best known in Nevada.

Newberry has the appearance of a [shield volcano](#) such as Mauna Loa, but this is misleading and overlooks its [silicic](#) explosive history. It is best characterized as a [composite volcano](#) like large volcanoes in Iceland.

Newberry developed where the northwest corner of the Basin and Range Province merges with the Cascades. [Tectonic](#) extension plays a significant role at Newberry and exerts strong control on [vent](#) alignments, which typically parallel fault trends. The caldera is at the intersection of fault systems of the High Lava Plains and Basin and Range, and the size and longevity of Newberry may reflect pathways to the surface created by this intersection.

Throughout its lifetime, Newberry has been the most explosive volcano in the Cascades, with at least 5 caldera-forming eruptions in less than 300,000 years. The most recent caldera developed about 65,000 years ago, when [explosive eruption](#) of basaltic andesite to rhyolite created the current 6 x 8 km (3.7 x 5 miles) caldera.

Several eruptions have occurred in the caldera since the last [glacier](#) melted nearly 12,000 years ago, the youngest of which, about 1,300 years old, produced the Big Obsidian Flow and a [tephra](#) that has been found in Idaho.

Newberry has one sibling in the Cascades. Donnelly-Nolan previously mapped the similar Medicine Lake volcano in northern California, about 200 km (120 miles) south of Newberry and east of the Cascade axis. Both large volcanoes provide the opportunity to visit a wide variety of young lava flows.

Seismic and geodetic monitoring has detected no unrest at Newberry. Eventually, though, the volcano will erupt again, and Newberry will be rightfully recognized among the nation's most hazardous volcanoes.

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HEADLINE	01/19 Earth temperature could near danger point?
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2023/01/19/el-nino-return-climate-record/
GIST	<p>Climate scientists are making an ominous prediction: the return of the weather pattern El Niño for the first time since 2019, which would bring a surge of warmth to an already overheated planet.</p> <p>After three years of a persistent La Niña cooling pattern influencing weather around the world, that regime is forecast to fade away in the coming months.</p> <p>Early forecasts project that 2024 — and potentially even 2023 — could set global average heat records, bringing the planet closer than ever to a warming threshold that scientists and policymakers have warned would be disastrous.</p> <p>“According to what the models are saying now, there is an increased likelihood of El Niño for the second part of the year,” said Andrew Kruczkiewicz, a senior researcher at the International Research Institute for</p>

Climate and Society at Columbia University. In a recent forecast that was set to be updated Thursday, the institute predicted a 66 percent chance of El Niño conditions by late summer or early fall.

“However,” he stressed, “things can change.”

Here is what to know as the world watches for its next El Niño.

El Niño could have major impacts

El Niño is marked by warmer-than-normal Pacific Ocean waters that trigger droughts in northern Australia, Indonesia and southern Africa, above-average precipitation across the southern United States, including in Southern California, and often [severe coral bleaching](#).

And it tends to bring a rise in average global temperatures, including pronounced warmth over southern Asia, Alaska and parts of South America. A strong El Niño helped send [global temperatures to a record high in 2016](#) (a mark tied in 2020).

Some scientists are predicting that the influence of El Niño, on top of several more years of planetary warming largely caused by the burning of fossil fuels, will push the next couple of years past those temperature records.

[Adam Scaife](#), the head of long-range prediction at the U.K. Met Office, and Bill McGuire, an emeritus professor of geophysical and climate hazards at University College London, are among those suggesting that El Niño could send average temperatures close to or above [1.5 degrees Celsius \(2.7 degrees Fahrenheit\) of warming](#) above preindustrial temperatures, a benchmark that has guided climate activism and portends perhaps irreversible damage.

Under El Niño, McGuire [wrote in Wired](#), “the extreme weather that has rampaged across our planet in 2021 and 2022 will pale into insignificance.”

Gavin Schmidt, director of the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies, said it’s possible that 2023 could bring record global warmth and that El Niño would mean 2024 would bring “a very high chance” of a record.

But Schmidt said it’s less clear that 1.5 degrees of warming is imminent, with Earth more than 1.1 degrees Celsius warmer than it was in 1880. Even with a strong El Niño, he predicted that warming could reach perhaps 1.35 degrees C above preindustrial levels.

El Niño’s arrival remains uncertain

Although some researchers foresee a transition to El Niño this year, there are reasons to doubt those forecasts. For starters, the climate system known as El Niño/Southern Oscillation would need first to shift into its neutral phase — essentially, the absence of either La Niña or El Niño.

Researchers at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s Climate Prediction Center expect that to happen in the early part of this year, but perhaps not until later. The center is predicting an 82 percent chance that neutral conditions develop some time between March and May.

In addition, scientists know this time of year is an especially difficult moment to read the climate tea leaves. They face a hurdle known as [the “spring predictability barrier”](#) — an extra layer of uncertainty within forecasting models because spring is an inherently transitional time for El Niño/Southern Oscillation.

The NOAA climate center acknowledged the challenge in forecasting an imminent end to La Niña: “However, lower accuracy during times of transition, and when predictions go through the spring, means that uncertainty remains high.”

Michael Glantz, a senior scientist at the University of Colorado who studies the societal impacts of El Niño, called the climatic prediction “a little bit of art, a little bit of science.”

“The cycle is not neat. This La Niña, they’ve been saying it’s going to end for a couple of years. It has not ended,” he said. “At some point, they’re going to be right.”

The world should prepare for extreme weather even without El Niño

Although El Niño helped push 2016 to record warmth, the planet was just as hot in 2020 — [despite the relative cooling influence of La Niña](#). This shows that any fixation on El Niño’s likely or potential doom and gloom is misplaced, Kruczkiewicz argued.

“Having an annual average temperature of even the highest of all time does not necessarily correlate to deadly heat waves all over the world at the same time,” he said. “We’ve had La Niña the past few years, and guess what? We’ve had a ton of heat waves.”

A similar contradiction can occur with Atlantic hurricanes, which El Niño is known to discourage from forming or strengthening. That influence didn’t stop Hurricane Andrew, the only landfalling East Coast hurricane during El Niño conditions in 1992, from becoming the country’s costliest-ever natural disaster at the time.

And even a shift from La Niña to neutral conditions is reason for concern, Kruczkiewicz said. The impacts La Niña and El Niño have on weather patterns are well known, but the absence of either one introduces a lack of predictability in seasonal forecasting, which is already [notoriously difficult](#).

“This neutral phase should not be a justification to relax,” Kruczkiewicz said.

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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	01/19 Fentanyl deaths among kids rise
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/us/fentanyl-children-deaths/2023/01/19/id/1105149/
GIST	<p>Fatal fentanyl poisonings among children under the age of 14 have risen over the past few years at a faster rate among that group than any other age demographic, the nonprofit Families Against Fentanyl reports.</p> <p>The group found that between 2019 and 2021, fentanyl deaths among children nearly quadrupled among those aged 5 to 14, tripled among those aged 1 to 4, and doubled among infants. In many of these instances, the drugs were ingested by the children who were unaware of what they were taking.</p> <p>The report notes that fentanyl "deaths increased sevenfold in the U.S. regardless of age from 2015 to 2021. Nearly 10x among infants; 15x among children 1 to 14; more than 8x among Americans 35 to 44; and more than 9x among Americans 55 to 74."</p> <p>The group's founder, Jim Rauh, told Fox News that fentanyl is "so prevalent in society now. Distribution goes to dispersion by entropy. That's the law of physics. And it's showing out because of the mass quantity of this material. ...</p> <p>"It's so prevalent that our innocent children, by incidental contact, are being killed. And now it's creeping into the schools and other enclosed environments."</p> <p>Dr. Wilson Compton of the National Institute on Drug Abuse said in a statement: "Even with those fentanyl test strips that may tell you that there's fentanyl in a product but it won't necessarily tell you how much, so it's people playing Russian roulette with their lives when they take these illegal products."</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 Average 'time-to-crime' for guns in WA
SOURCE	https://patch.com/washington/seattle/average-time-crime-firearms-washington
GIST	<p>Gun control laws vary across the U.S., and five states and the District of Columbia currently impose a waiting period on prospective gun buyers. Waiting periods mandate that a specific amount of time must elapse between when a gun is purchased and when the buyer can possess it. Depending on the state, waiting periods range from three days to two weeks.</p> <p>Designed to reduce the likelihood of an impulsive act of violence, waiting periods have been shown, in some studies, to reduce rates of firearm suicide by 7% to 11%, and gun-related homicides by about 17%. (Here is a look at the states where gun related crimes are surging.)</p> <p>Though waiting periods may reduce gun violence to a degree, in reality, most firearms that wind up at crime scenes were purchased years prior. Among all known firearms linked to a crime in 2021, an average of 6.2 years has elapsed between the retail sale of the firearm and when it was recovered by law enforcement, according to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives. This measure, known as "time-to-crime," can vary substantially from state to state, and these variations have meaningful implications. For any given firearm, the ATF considers a time-to-crime of less than three years a potential red flag for gun trafficking.</p> <p>The average time-to-crime for a firearm recovered by law enforcement in Washington is 8.8 years, the sixth longest among states.</p> <p>Of the 4,248 guns recovered in Washington in 2021, 1,693, or 39.9%, were sold by a retailer within the last three years, and 906, or 21.3% were sold within one year.</p> <p>All time-to-crime measures in this story are for firearms the ATF traced in 2021.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 FBI: law enforcement officers deaths data
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/law-enforcement-and-public-safety/fbi-releases-preliminary-data-on-law-enforcement-officer-deaths-from-january-through-december-2022/
GIST	<p>The FBI released a graphic presentation of data regarding line-of-duty deaths, both felonious and accidental, collected from law enforcement agencies across the United States and U.S. territories by the FBI's Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted Data Collection. This preliminary information is provided for officer safety studies, training, and other initiatives. The data are also published annually in the <i>Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted</i> release. The data is accurate as of 01/01/2023.</p> <p>The 60 law enforcement officers feloniously killed in 2022 represent a 17.8% decrease compared to the 73 officers killed during 2021. Firearms were used in 81.7% of the felonious deaths in 2022, with 59.2% of the type of firearm used not currently reported. The leading circumstances surrounding officers' deaths included activities related to ambushes on officers, investigative/enforcement activities, unprovoked attacks on officers, and responses to disorderly/disturbance calls. The 12 ambush attacks in 2022 are a 50% increase compared to the eight ambush attacks in 2021. Conversely, unprovoked attacks in 2022 (six) decreased by 75% compared to 2021 (24). Accidental law enforcement deaths increased by 3.6% in 2022 (58) compared to 2021 (56). The accidental deaths in 2022 were due primarily to motor vehicle accidents, pedestrian officers being struck by vehicles, and airplane crashes. The southern region had the most law enforcement deaths in 2022, with 65 deaths total (31 felonious, 34 accidental).</p> <p>Although not represented in the graphics below, 81 died in the line of duty in 2022 from the following medical conditions: 52 officers from illnesses related to COVID-19, 12 officers due to heart attacks, five officers from conditions as a result of responses to 9/11, and 12 officers due to other natural causes.</p> <p>A bar graph shows officer deaths by year. Numbers of felonious deaths are shown for the years 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022. Numbers of accidental deaths are shown for the years 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022. The number of felonious deaths for 2022 is 60. The number of felonious deaths for 2021</p>

	is 73. The number of felonious deaths for 2020 is 46. The number of felonious deaths for 2019 is 48. The number of felonious deaths for 2019 is 57. The number of accidental deaths for 2022 is 58. The number of accidental deaths for 2021 is 56. The number of accidental deaths for 2020 is 46. The number of accidental deaths for 2019 is 41. The number of accidental deaths for 2018 is 50.
Return to Top	Read the report at FBI

HEADLINE	01/20 DEA: enough fentanyl to kill everyone in US
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2023/01/20/dea-said-it-seized-enough-fentanyl-kill-us-all-claim-adds-up/
GIST	<p><i>“In the past year, the men and women of the DEA have relentlessly worked to seize over 379 million deadly doses of fentanyl from communities across the country ... enough deadly doses of fentanyl to kill every American.”</i></p> <p>— Anne Milgram, administrator of the Drug Enforcement Administration, in a statement, Dec. 20</p> <p><i>“This year alone, DEA has seized enough fentanyl to provide a lethal dose to every American. Much of this fentanyl is in the form of fake prescription pills. In 2021, DEA has seized a staggering 20.4 million fake prescription pills.”</i></p> <p>— DEA statement, Dec. 16, 2021</p> <p>Shortly before the holidays, the DEA made headlines with its announcement that enough doses of fentanyl had been seized by law enforcement in 2022 to kill every American. The statement was issued just days after The Washington Post published a searing indictment of how the DEA and other government agencies had failed over the years to take effective action to stem the flow of fentanyl in the United States, causing a spike in fatal overdoses.</p> <p>We’re always interested in explaining how such figures are calculated, as it was not obvious in the DEA announcement. We were especially puzzled because the DEA made a similar claim at the end of 2021, but with less specificity — and the math did not seem to add up when we relied on metrics used in other DEA and Justice Department announcements. After some prodding, DEA provided a senior laboratory official to explain.</p> <p>The numbers</p> <p>The DEA, along with other law enforcement agencies, tracks and seizes illicit drugs in the United States. The agency is not including fentanyl seizures at the border by Customs and Border Control — which, for fentanyl powder, in fiscal 2022, was almost 50 percent higher than the number (“more than 10,000 pounds”) cited by DEA.</p> <p>Fentanyl, a synthetic opioid, is 50 times more powerful than heroin. As it has flooded into the United States, it increasingly has been mixed with other drugs, such as heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine and MDMA, so that some users may not realize that the product they purchased was laced with fentanyl. Counterfeit prescription pills can also be laced with fentanyl, sometimes in lethal doses.</p> <p>What’s a lethal dose? The DEA estimates that about 2 milligrams of pure fentanyl is lethal, though officials acknowledge that it varies by person, depending on body size, tolerance and past usage. An average adult male might be able to tolerate as much as 3 milligrams. But even that is just a few grains, barely enough to fit on the tip of a sharpened pencil.</p> <p>According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, a person overdosing on fentanyl slows his or her breathing — or even stops breathing entirely — and thus less oxygen reaches the brain, causing a coma, brain damage or death.</p> <p>There are two parts to the DEA’s calculation — potential deaths from counterfeit pills and potential deaths from powder. Let’s look at the powder first.</p>

During the year, the DEA lab official said, the agency tested more than 1,000 samples of seized fentanyl. On average, the powder had 14.4 percent purity. So 10,000 pounds of seized powder would amount to 1,440 pounds of pure fentanyl. DEA officials then divided the amount seized — which was described as more than 10,000 pounds — by 2 milligrams, yielding about 353.5 million potentially lethal doses of the powder.

As for the fake pills, DEA says it seized 50.6 million of them. For most of the year, DEA testing indicated that 4 out of 10 pills contained a lethal dose. But that changed in October, after the agency [announced](#) that 6 out of 10 pills had a lethal dose.

So, to calculate the number of pills with lethal doses, the agency assumed 40 percent from January to September (about 17 million pills) and 60 percent from October to December (8 million). That adds up to about 25.5 million doses.

Combining the estimates for powder and pills yields 379 million. About 330 million people reside in the United States.

Still, if one assumes a lethal dose was 3 milligrams, [as some law enforcement officials have said](#), including [at the DEA](#), then that would cut the number of lethal doses from powder to 235 million, and DEA would fall well short of its headline-making statistic.

We found that some law enforcement officials, including at the DEA, also have not been careful about accounting for the purity of fentanyl powder. For instance, [a Feb. 2, 2021, news release](#) said that “DEA’s 9 kilograms of fentanyl seized in Iowa last year carries enough lethal doses for four-and-a-half million users.” The news release made the mistake of assuming the seizure was 100 percent pure.

A DEA official noted that the news release predated the arrival of Milgram, the administrator. He said she was “laser-focused” on working with the DEA lab to provide consistent and accurate numbers. In the past year, the lab has created an internal dashboard that allows officials to get up-to-date estimates on seizures and potential lethal doses with the click of a button. When officials issued the 2021 release, they did not provide a figure for total lethal doses but believed it was more than the U.S. population. The lab official said a recent calculation found it added up to 340 million doses — just enough to make it accurate, assuming a lethal dose is 2 milligrams.

The Bottom Line

The DEA is able to justify its headline-making number if one accepts that 2 milligrams of pure fentanyl is a lethal dose. That’s probably good enough for government work.

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HEADLINE	01/20 Bloody battle cinched El Chapo son arrest
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/mexican-officials-and-witnesses-recount-gunbattle-that-captured-son-of-joaquin-el-chapo-guzman-11674163002?mod=hp_lead_pos5
GIST	<p>JESÚS MARÍA, Mexico—In the predawn hours of Jan. 5, hundreds of Sinaloa cartel gunmen raced to this dusty town to try to rescue their boss from Mexican soldiers who had laid siege to his ranch, according to residents, gang members and Mexico’s military.</p> <p>But the small army of gunmen proved no match for Mexico’s military, which used gunships to strafe the convoy of pickup trucks rigged with makeshift armor and high-caliber guns in the capture of Ovidio Guzmán, the son of former Sinaloa cartel boss Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán, witnesses said.</p> <p>“We were defeated,” said a 30-year-old cartel gunman brandishing an AK-47 rifle and pistols and hiding his features behind a black balaclava in the sparsely populated Sierra Madre mountains north of Jesús María. “They were better prepared.”</p>

The 32-year-old Mr. Guzmán has been a pioneer in the illegal production and smuggling to the U.S. of [the deadly synthetic opioid fentanyl](#), say people involved in the business and Mexican officials. His cartel suffered a major blow with his capture, but a chemist who is in contact with other lab operators says they have already restarted production and will keep the business going.

The Sinaloa cartel, along with its main rival the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, [controls a burgeoning trade in fentanyl](#), which caused most of the 107,000 overdose deaths in the U.S. in 2021, U.S. officials say. Much of it is produced in makeshift laboratories near the state capital Culiacán.

[Stemming fentanyl flows](#) from Mexico to the U.S. was at the top of the agenda when President Biden and his Mexican counterpart Andrés Manuel López Obrador met in Mexico City just four days after the gunbattle.

In 2021, the U.S. State Department said that the younger Mr. Guzmán, along with a brother, was overseeing 11 laboratories in Sinaloa that produced up to 5,000 pounds of methamphetamine a month. At the time, the U.S. offered a \$5 million reward for information leading to his capture. Mr. Guzmán was indicted in 2018 in Washington, D.C. on charges of [smuggling methamphetamine, cocaine and marijuana](#).

“They arrested him at a time when he was consolidating power,” said Alejandro Schtulmann, head of Mexican political risk consulting firm Empra.

Lawyers for Mr. Guzmán couldn’t be reached for comment. One of his lawyers told local media that he didn’t know if there are charges against Mr. Guzmán in Mexico and that his client was suffering from severe health problems. His lawyers have filed an injunction against a U.S. extradition request.

In the daylong battle, the cartel lost many of its homemade armored trucks. Ten soldiers, including an army colonel, and 19 cartel gunmen were killed, Mexican Defense Minister Luis Crescencio Sandoval said at a press conference the following morning. Thirty-five soldiers were wounded, he said.

The chemist, who runs a fentanyl lab and pill factory near Culiacán, said the hundreds of gunmen mobilized by the cartel to try to rescue Mr. Guzmán showed its strength.

“If they kill 200 people, 500 more will pick up their rifles,” he said.

The chemist said he shut down his business as a precaution the day of the gunbattle, but six days later he had started to produce the synthetic opioid again. He said other lab operators were doing the same.

“Ovidio was the boss,” he said. “But we can’t wait.”

Mr. Guzmán is being held at the country’s highest security prison, the same one from which his father [made a spectacular escape](#) through a mile-long tunnel in 2015. The elder [Mr. Guzmán was recaptured](#) and extradited to the U.S. in 2017 and is now serving a life sentence in a maximum-security prison in Colorado.

Gen. Sandoval said at another press conference that the younger Mr. Guzmán led a Sinaloa cartel faction. He and three other sons of “El Chapo”—including Iván Archivaldo, considered to be the most powerful of the four—constitute the leadership of the “Chapitos,” one of the two most important groups within the loosely structured cartel.

Gen. Sandoval said the Mexican army destroyed or captured 40 cartel vehicles, including 26 armored trucks. Several were adorned with the skull logo of the Punisher, the Marvel Comics antihero, next to that of a cartoon mouse—a reference to Ovidio, whose nickname is “El Ratón,” or the Mouse.

Residents of Jesús María, a town of some 2,000 inhabitants about 20 miles north of Culiacán, said last week they were awakened at 4:20 a.m. by intense shooting. They said they were too scared to peer outside, so ducked into bathrooms with their children, or sought refuge under beds.

Cartel gunmen poured into Jesús María to rescue their boss, residents and Mexico's military said. In Culiacán, other cartel members commandeered trucks, buses and cars, set them ablaze to set up roadblocks and cut off the city. Gunmen also shot at Culiacán's airport as part of the effort to prevent Mr. Guzmán's capture and extraction. One bullet hit a commercial airliner as it was getting ready to take off, said Aeromexico, the country's flagship airline. At one point, gunmen hit two Mexican Air Force planes, forcing them to make emergency landings, Gen. Sandoval said.

When the 30-year-old in the black balaclava and another cartel gunman reached Jesús María with a convoy of nine armored trucks, they say they found bodies of dead gunmen and soldiers strewn on the street leading to Mr. Guzmán's home, and armored vehicles on fire. Their own armored truck was destroyed, and they lost 14 companions. The gunmen say the cartel lost about 70 men overall.

There are differing accounts of how the operation unfolded. According to Gen. Sandoval, the defense secretary, the arrest was the result of six months of surveillance and intelligence work. It was put into action suddenly when soldiers chanced upon an armed convoy in which Mr. Guzmán was riding, he said. Gen. Sandoval said the soldiers were fired upon and they returned fire, and when the gunmen retreated to a house the soldiers followed.

Town residents and cartel gunmen say there was no initial encounter with a convoy, but that soldiers shot their way into Mr. Guzmán's home. The army didn't respond to a request seeking comment on that version of events.

The operation earlier this month marks a change from 2019, when the Mexican army [was forced to free Mr. Guzmán](#) soon after capturing him in broad daylight in Culiacán. That time, hundreds of gunmen poured into the city and captured soldiers. Fearing a bloodbath, Mr. López Obrador ordered Mr. Guzmán's release.

"We sowed terror," said the second cartel gunman, who took part in both attempts to free Mr. Guzmán. "We kidnapped people and said we were going to kill them."

The "Culiacanazo," as the 2019 attack became known, was a humiliation for Mr. López Obrador's government and Mexico's army that [further empowered drug cartels](#), experts said.

Érida Serrano, who lives across the street from Ovidio Guzmán's ranch, said that during the recent gunfight to capture Mr. Guzmán she hid out in her bedroom, terrified. Like many other residents of Jesús María, which is a Guzmán family redoubt and hometown to two of "El Chapo" Guzmán's former wives, the 57-year-old Ms. Serrano has a high opinion of Ovidio, who she said helps townspeople with jobs and covering their medical and funeral expenses.

Ms. Serrano's porch roof and walls were perforated by bullet holes. Four bullets broke through her windows.

"It was horrible," she said. "If I had high blood pressure, I would have died."

She said that early in the battle, two of Mr. Guzmán's bodyguards took refuge in her house. During a lull in the fighting, she said the bodyguards helped to move her in her wheelchair to the relative safety of a neighbor's house. She is angry at the Mexican Army soldiers who she said tore up her house looking for weapons. She said they looted her home, stealing her blender, kitchen pots and her son's tennis shoes. A spokesman for the Mexican army didn't respond to requests for comment.

To counter the resentment of people in town, the Mexican Army set up a civil action unit soon after the clash, offering free haircuts, steak tacos and plastic bottles of water over the course of the next few days.

But most townspeople appeared to ignore the offers. Last week, about 50 residents protested in Culiacán and in Jesús María demanding the army leave town.

	<p>“My son is terrorized by what happened,” said Sonia Mesa, one of the protesters. “We will only accept help when the army leaves.”</p> <p>Mr. Guzmán was evacuated from Jesús María on a helicopter, Gen. Sandoval said.</p> <p>Last week, the bullet-pocked gates of Mr. Guzmán’s spacious vacation ranch house were open, a yellow crime tape fluttering in the breeze. Hundreds of spent shell casings littered the ground in the large parking area and hundreds more were on the floor of the living room. Dried blood was spread on a laundry-room floor.</p> <p>After Mr. Guzmán’s capture, “the Sinaloa cartel will absorb the hit and keep going,” said Adrián López, the editor of Noroeste, the leading newspaper in Culiacán.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 Ex-Sweden intel officer jailed: Russia spy
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/19/former-swedish-intelligence-officer-receives-life-term-for-spying-for-russia
GIST	<p>A court in Stockholm has sentenced a former Swedish intelligence officer to life imprisonment and his younger brother to 10 years after finding both guilty of spying for Russia’s military intelligence service for more than a decade.</p> <p>Peyman Kia, 42, served in the Swedish security and counter-intelligence service, Säpo, and in armed forces intelligence agencies, including the foreign intelligence agency (Must) and KSI, a top-secret unit dealing with Swedish spies abroad.</p> <p>He was found guilty of aggravated espionage and unauthorised handling of classified documents. The judge, Måns Wigén, said Kia had abused the trust placed in him in order to aid Russia, the country posing “the biggest threat to Sweden”.</p> <p>His brother Payam, 35, was convicted of aggravated espionage for planning the crime and managing contacts with Russia’s GRU military intelligence agency, passing on 45 of the 90 documents Peyman was found to have gathered.</p> <p>The court said they had “jointly and in concertation, without authorisation and to assist Russia and the GRU, acquired, forwarded and shared information whose disclosure to a foreign power could be detrimental to Sweden’s security”.</p> <p>The Iranian-born brothers, both of whom hold Swedish citizenship, have denied the charges and are expected to appeal against them. They were arrested in 2021 when Säpo suspected it had a mole and accused them of having spied for Moscow since 2011.</p> <p>Much of the evidence, court hearing, and full decision was not made public for national security reasons, and the court conceded that despite evidence including USB sticks, laptops and mobile phones, “some pieces of the puzzle are missing”.</p> <p>It found that in 2016-17, Peyman Kia handled cash worth about 550,000 kronor (£43,000), most of it in US dollars, which it said most likely represented payment from Russia.</p> <p>The verdict followed the spectacular pre-dawn arrest late last year in a wealthy Stockholm suburb of a Russian couple suspected of carrying out “illegal intelligence activities” against Sweden and the US – also for more than 10 years.</p>

	<p>The “wholly unremarkable” pair, who have not been formally named by Swedish authorities, reportedly arrived in Sweden in 1997, acquired Swedish nationality and ran an IT and communications equipment import-export firm.</p> <p>A Stockholm court ordered the man to be held on suspicion of “aggravated illegal intelligence activities against Sweden and a foreign power”, but released his partner – suspected of being his accomplice – pending inquiries. Both deny all the allegations.</p> <p>Swedish media has speculated that the couple’s alleged connections to Moscow’s intelligence community mean they were almost certainly sleeper agents, and the public prosecutor, Henrik Olin, has said the husband was “linked to the GRU”.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 Arrests: teens stealing Kia; TikTok trend
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/parkland-teens-arrested-stealing-kia-suv-pierce-county-high-school-parking-lot-washington-state-vehicle-theft-juvenile-boy-girl-deputy-sheriff-department-marijuana#
GIST	<p>The PCSD said at least two teens stole a car just before 2 p.m. from the parking lot. A school resource officer reported seeing a former student smash out a back window of a Kia SUV, then two teens got in and took off, the department said.</p> <p>“The deputy started looking for the vehicle and saw it coming towards him,” Sgt. Moss added. “He got out and talked to the driver- a young female, and she admitted it was stolen.”</p> <p>Authorities detained the 15-year-old driver and a 16-year-old boy in the passenger seat. Sheriff’s officials said this case could be connected to an uptick in car thefts because of a challenge on TikTok that teaches people how to steal certain vehicles.</p> <p>“Because of that issue, these are the number one car we’re seeing stolen every day,” Sgt. Moss said. “It’s Kias and Hyundais.”</p> <p>Washington High School teachers and students said it’s a disturbing trend.</p> <p>“If it’s viral, I guarantee all the students have seen it,” teacher Steve Mead said.</p> <p>Sgt. Moss stated the juveniles and others committing car thefts across the county are often repeat offenders.</p> <p>“The ones that we’re arresting they’ve been involved in multiple instances, being passengers or stealing vehicles themselves over and over again,” he said.</p> <p>While the department has few resources to investigate these crimes amid short-staffing and a focus on violent crime, PCSD has a message for these thieves influenced by social media trends or otherwise: “You might not get charged a couple of times. But in the long run, you are ruining your life,” Sgt. Moss said. “We are seeing kids getting shot, and we’re seeing kids getting charged as adults.”</p> <p>Prosecutors charged the young driver with illegally possessing a stolen vehicle, vehicle theft tools, and marijuana. She was placed on curfew monitoring.</p> <p>The passenger was charged with taking a motor vehicle without permission.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 Thurston Co. sheriff increases jail bookings
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/thurston-countys-new-sheriff-to-change-pursuit-policies-increase-jail-bookings-deputy-crime-derek-sanders-chase-criminal-public-safety#

GIST	<p>THURSTON COUNTY, Wash. — Crime-fighting is making a course correction in Thurston County as a new sheriff resets the rules on how to handle certain lawbreakers.</p> <p>Since taking office at the start of the month, Sheriff Derek Sanders has expanded the scenarios in which deputies can pursue suspects and will drop some of the restrictions that limited who gets booked in jail. Too many criminals were taking advantage of the leeway they were given under previous policies, according to Sanders, and that in turn, was compromising public safety.</p> <p>During the pandemic, efforts were made to minimize the inmate population at the Thurston County Corrections Facility.</p> <p>“So you'd get situations where we would catch someone burglarizing your detached shop, and then we would let them leave the scene,” Sanders said.</p> <p>While deputies would take down the suspect’s information and often refer the person for charges, some suspects would go on to burglarize other locations while their court date was pending. Now people arrested for felony burglary will be held until released by the courts, though Sanders said the statewide limits on police pursuits can make it hard to catch them in the first place.</p> <p>“To add on to property crime, we can't pursue property crime anymore and word gets around to criminals pretty quick,” the sheriff said.</p> <p>Deputies have since been instructed to chase all DUI suspects, which Sanders said wasn’t the policy in Thurston County before he took office.</p> <p>“We have the opportunity as police to get them off the road expeditiously with spike strips or pit maneuvers,” Sanders said. “I’m much more comfortable with deciding to pursue and have it not work out than not doing something to try to stop a DUI, and it ends up killing a family.”</p> <p>The sheriff’s office is also close to launching a specialized domestic violence team that can focus on all the issues that come up after the initial arrest.</p> <p>“They can kind of build a better relationship with the victims through the whole process. They can do follow-up,” Sanders said.</p> <p>Down the road, he plans to push a new approach to homelessness that is seeing success elsewhere.</p> <p>“The idea is you pair two deputies, that's your enforcement, with two social workers, that's your compassion, and that's when you start making proactive contacts in homeless camps,” he said.</p> <p>The sheriff also wants to get their body camera program fully operational which he said is critical for transparency and building public trust.</p> <p>Like many agencies, the Thurston County Sheriff’s Office is badly understaffed. The patrol division is funded for 56 deputies but is currently short by 22, though recruits are coming in from the academy or finishing up their field training. At the jail, 13 of the 91 positions remain unfilled. Sanders said recruitment is a top priority.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 Clallam Co. SO turns to crowdfunding help
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/sheriffs-office-turns-crowdfunding-cover-dna-testing-human-foot-found-port-angeles/ZEE5YFKRIRDELIKF67IIRRPKU/
GIST	CLALLAM COUNTY, Wash. — The Clallam County Sheriff’s Office has turned to crowdfunding to cover the costs of DNA testing that could help identify a human foot that was discovered on a beach.

In December 2021, a woman's New Balance size 8 shoe containing a human foot was found near the mouth of the Elwha River in Port Angeles.

With the limited recovery of the woman's remains, investigators have been unable to determine much about the woman and have exhausted leads about her identity.

In 2022, the sheriff's office looked to the forensic DNA laboratory [Othram](#) to determine if advanced testing could help establish the identity of the woman or a close relative.

To cover the costs, investigators set up a crowdfunding account.

While it may seem unusual, the method used to raise money on platforms like GoFundMe is also being used to help police solve crimes.

The account being used by the sheriff's office is with [DNASolves](#), which specifically focuses on human identification investigations by law enforcement.

It combines crowdfunding, volunteered data, and genomics to help police solve violent crimes, such as homicides and sexual assaults, according to the company.

Those who wish to donate to the Port Angeles case [can follow this link](#).

Anyone with information that may help the investigation is asked to call the Clallam County Sheriff's Office tip line at 360-417-2540 and reference a case #2021-00023819.

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HEADLINE	01/19 Bellevue police arrest serial armed robbers
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/3-arrested-charged-after-string-armed-robberies-across-king-county/4VGIUW7735G4PNJY3YGW3X4DPI/
GIST	<p>Three suspects were arrested and charged for a series of violent crimes that occurred over a two-month span in King County, the Bellevue Police Department announced Thursday.</p> <p>According to police, Daniel Recinos, Cesar Sandoval, and Ricardo Valencia-Alvarez allegedly used cars they stole in violent carjackings and kidnappings to commit armed robberies at gas stations and convenience stores starting on Oct. 12, 2022.</p> <p>The crimes happened in cities throughout King County, including Bellevue, Burien, Kent, Maple Valley, Mercer Island, Redmond, and Seattle.</p> <p>Police said the three suspects allegedly threatened clerks at the stores with pistols and fired a shot inside of a business in Renton.</p> <p>Bellevue police posted surveillance video of one of the robberies on its YouTube page.</p> <p>“These three suspects are charged with violently robbing multiple businesses without regard for the employees they traumatized,” said Bellevue Police Captain Shelby Shearer. “We appreciate our partners in the Seattle Police Department and King County Sheriff’s Office who worked closely with us to ensure these dangerous individuals were taken off the streets.”</p> <p>Recinos is charged with five counts of first-degree robbery, one count of first-degree kidnapping, and two counts of unlawful possession of a firearm. His bail was set at \$1 million.</p> <p>Sandoval is charged with nine counts of first-degree robbery. His bail was also set at \$1 million.</p> <p>Valencia-Alvarez is charged with seven counts of first-degree robbery. His bail was set at \$750,000.</p>

HEADLINE	01/19 FBI reward: pregnancy aid center vandals
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/fbi-offering-reward-find-person-responsible-vandalizing-pregnancy-resource-center-everett/6XANWDOTUNFL3AC7DTSYVBIWXY/
GIST	<p>The FBI is now offering a reward in an effort to track down the person or people who vandalized and tried to burn down Two Hearts Pregnancy Aid in Everett.</p> <p>It happened on June 27, 2022, but so far the feds have come up empty-handed on a suspect.</p> <p>“Well, it’s scary, yeah. We’ve lived on Hoyt Avenue for 15 years and we always see the protesters up there and stuff,” Lisa, who lives nearby, said.</p> <p>Federal agents said that someone threw what they’re calling an “incendiary device” through a window and tried to light the place on fire.</p> <p>“It’s really extreme, yeah. I can’t believe someone would do that,” said Adrian Black, who lives in Everett.</p> <p>Agents hope that the reward they’re offering will provide new leads and ultimately lead to an arrest.</p> <p>“Someone out there knows something, they’ve seen something, they’ve heard something and we want to motivate that person to come forward and help us in our investigation,” FBI Seattle Assistant Special Agent in Charge Kelly Smith said. “They can contact the Seattle FBI office, they can also contact us online at tips.fbi.gov or our nationwide call center at 1-800-CALL-FBI.”</p> <p>Smith said this type of attack isn’t unique to Washington and it’s been happening since Roe v. Wade was overturned.</p> <p>“Since June 2022, as a result of or since the Dobbs decision, we’ve seen an uptick of violence, which is why this reward is being announced. Because we’d like to put an end to that and bring those responsible to justice,” Smith said.</p> <p>In all, the FBI is investigating 10 of these cases coast-to-coast, three of them happening in Oregon.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 Whitman Co. prosecutors ‘racist tropes’
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/prosecutors-asked-about-a-black-mans-nationality-wa-supreme-court-says-it-showed-racial-bias/
GIST	<p>Whitman County prosecutors improperly appealed to jurors’ racial bias when they repeatedly asked witnesses about a Black defendant’s “nationality,” even though the defendant was an American citizen, the Washington state Supreme Court ruled unanimously on Thursday.</p> <p>Prosecutors also acted improperly by referring to white witnesses as “good Samaritans,” while conspicuously excluding the sole Black witness, even though the Black witness had tried to de-escalate the situation, the Supreme Court found.</p> <p>The case is the latest in an ongoing effort by the state Supreme Court to try to address systemic racism in the criminal legal system.</p> <p>In the case, Tyler Terrell Bagby was charged with burglary, assault, harassment and malicious mischief, based on a 2018 incident at a fraternity party where, during an argument with his girlfriend, he punched an onlooker.</p>

His lawyers conceded that he had punched the onlooker, but argued that it was self-defense. “The jury found Bagby guilty of residential burglary, fourth degree assault, and harassment but not guilty of malicious mischief,” the court noted.

During the trial held the same year as the incident, Bagby’s identity was not contested. But at least a half dozen times at trial, a prosecutor asked witnesses to identify Bagby’s “nationality.”

Bagby, born in California, is an American citizen. But witnesses inferred questions about his nationality to be in reference to Bagby’s race, to which they responded that he was African American or Black, [the court wrote](#).

“The prosecutor’s ‘othering’ of Tyler before an all-white jury denied him a fair trial,” Travis Stearns, one of Bagby’s attorneys, said Thursday. “Tyler’s case is not an anomaly, as our criminal legal system continues to dehumanize Black men.”

The purpose of the prosecutor’s remarks, the court wrote, must be to emphasize Bagby’s race.

“By calling attention to Bagby’s ‘nationality,’ the prosecutor played into a stereotype that to be American is to be white and to be Black is somehow ‘foreign,’” Justice Raquel Montoya-Lewis wrote for the court.

“Here, when the prosecutor continuously referred to Bagby’s nationality, ethnicity, and race, it primed the all-white jury to pay more attention to this racial difference, thereby activating any anti-Black implicit biases they may hold.”

It is not necessary, the court wrote, for the prosecutor to have meant for his remarks to be racially biased. Rather, they must meet the standard of a “flagrant or apparently intentional appeal” to racial bias.

“We are concerned with the impact of racial bias — not a person’s intent,” Montoya-Lewis wrote.

And, in analyzing the impact of the prosecutor’s remarks, the court returned to a standard it set in 2018 and has now used to evaluate [prosecutorial misconduct](#), juror misconduct, jury selection practices and [police seizures](#).

The standard: Would an “objective observer” view the conduct, in this case the prosecutor’s references to nationality and “good Samaritans,” as an appeal to jurors’ racial biases or prejudices? “Objective observers” must be aware of how America’s history of race and ethnic discrimination, while implicit, institutional and unconscious biases, and discrimination have influenced jury verdicts in Washington, the court said.

The court noted the frequency of the prosecutor’s references to “nationality,” and said it could find no purpose for those remarks other than to emphasize Bagby’s race.

During cross examination, the prosecutor also repeatedly asked Bagby about his dog, including whether he cared about it, despite the dog having no relevance to the case.

“Who has a dog for over a year and don’t care about him?” Bagby responded. “Yes, I do.”

“Unfortunately, some people [don’t],” the prosecutor said, “but I’m glad to hear you’re not one of them.”

Four of the nine justices found that this also constituted misconduct, writing that the questions “evoke a harmful racial trope about Black men and their mistreatment of dogs.”

The Supreme Court vacated Bagby’s convictions and sent the case back to the trial court.

	“The prosecutor repeatedly evoked racist tropes and used racially coded language in a manner that cannot fairly be ignored,” Montoya-Lewis wrote. “The objective observer could understand that the sheer volume of comments could have made it impossible for jurors to ignore the color of Bagby’s skin.”
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HEADLINE	01/19 Documents on house Idaho students killed
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/documents-reveal-info-on-house-where-university-of-idaho-students-were-killed/
GIST	<p><i>The Idaho Statesman</i> - At 1122 King Road in Moscow, Idaho, sits the gray six-bedroom, three-bathroom house that continues to be the source of significant national attention.</p> <p>Someone walking by on Nov. 12 would have seen a lumpy couch on the back porch, trendy garden lights strung across the rear balcony and a pair of pink cowboy boots in one window — telltale signs that this house, like many in the area, was a student rental.</p> <p>The most recent leaseholders were six University of Idaho undergraduates who signed a 12-month contract that began June 5, according to the property management firm that oversees the home. One person on the lease no longer lived there.</p> <p>By Nov. 13, the house would be surrounded by yellow crime scene tape.</p> <p>In the early morning hours that Sunday, Madison Mogen, Kaylee Goncalves, Xana Kernodle and Kernodle’s boyfriend, Ethan Chapin, were stabbed to death in the house.</p> <p>After a 911 call made from the cellphone of one of the two surviving roommates around noon, law enforcement arrived, marking the start of an investigation that would go on for nearly seven weeks before an arrest was made.</p> <p>More than 2,500 miles away in a much smaller town — Albrightsville, Pennsylvania, population 211 — is another house. White with red shutters, it sits tucked into the rolling Pocono Mountains made famous for the escape they provide East Coast city dwellers.</p> <p>This house, too, saw a swarm of law enforcement when police came to arrest 28-year-old Washington State University graduate student Bryan Kohberger on Dec. 30.</p> <p>After Kohberger’s extradition to Idaho, police filed a 19-page affidavit that provided new details about what they think happened inside the house on King Road, and what was found.</p> <p>The Idaho Statesman has used the affidavit to update its previous reporting on the house, which was based on photos from rental listings and documents submitted by former owners to the city of Moscow. Depictions of the floors and dimensions are approximations created by the Statesman based on that information.</p> <p>Just north of the home is the university’s new Greek Row, where many fraternity and sorority activities take place. That proximity meant the area was particularly popular among those involved in U of I Greek life, including sorority members Goncalves, Kernodle and Mogen.</p> <p>“It’s a tight-knit community,” Merida McClanahan, supervisor at Team Idaho Real Estate & Property Management, told the Statesman in a phone interview. “They’re on the back side of campus right across the street from Greek Row, and those kids cycle in and out.”</p> <p>The King Road home’s six bedrooms had at one time been rented as separate apartments, McClanahan said.</p> <p>“Primarily for the last 12 years, it has been rented as one unit as a single-family home,” she said.</p>

The house originally had two floors, but an owner requested to add the lowest floor in 2000, according to Moscow city permits. Built into a hillside, the house has one exterior door on each floor.

The home is 3,120 square feet, according to Zillow. The Latah County Assessor's Office assessed its value at \$343,848 in August.

The listed owner of the King Road property didn't return email and phone messages from the Statesman.

The first floor

City records and photos from online rental listings indicate the first floor has two bedrooms that open into a shared hallway. The hallway also leads to a bathroom and a stairway that goes to the second floor.

All five tenants, plus Chapin, were home by 2 the morning of the killings, and everyone was in their bedrooms by 4 a.m., according to statements to police by the surviving roommates. Police believe the [Nov. 13 attack](#) took place between 4 a.m. and 4:25 a.m.

The Idaho Statesman previously reported that both surviving roommates had been on the first floor at the time of the attack after a Moscow Police Department spokesperson provided that information in an email on Nov. 21.

Contrary to that police statement, the affidavit revealed that only one roommate had a bedroom on the first floor. The room was on the east side of the building.

Based on the affidavit, it appears no one slept in the first-floor bedroom on the west side that night. The sixth person who was on the lease moved out before the start of the semester, police said.

Police included no statement in the affidavit that indicated the roommate living on the first floor saw or heard anything at the time of the attack.

Former first-floor tenant Ryan Augusta told [Fox News](#) that he typically "heard nothing" from the second and third floors when he lived there in 2019. Reached by the Statesman, Augusta said he stood by that statement.

Attempts by the Statesman to reach the two surviving roommates have been unsuccessful.

Between the first-floor bedrooms, a door opens to the property's driveway. Despite the home's King Road mailing address, the driveway connects directly to Queen Road.

On Nov. 13, starting at 3:29 a.m., a camera captured a white Hyundai Elantra — the same type of car owned by Kohberger — driving past the house several times, according to the affidavit. As it neared the area a fourth time, at 4:04 a.m., the vehicle could be seen going past the house before stopping in front of a neighboring building, turning around and driving back toward the house. The camera shows it again at about 4:20 a.m., driving away from the house.

The second floor

The second floor of the home includes two bedrooms, a bathroom, a kitchen and two separate staircases — one leads to the first floor and one to the third floor.

This floor can be accessed from the outside through a sliding-glass door connecting the porch and kitchen.

Kernodle's bedroom was on the west side of the second floor. Chapin's mother, Stacy Chapin, previously confirmed to the Statesman that her son spent the night at his girlfriend's house, and Kernodle's father, Jeffrey Kernodle, [told an Arizona TV station](#) in an interview in November that his daughter and Chapin had been dating for about a year.

The other surviving roommate's bedroom, on the southeast side, was also on this floor. The affidavit provided new details about what she told police:

On the night of the attack, she said she was awakened at about 4 a.m. by what "sounded like Goncalves playing with her dog in one of the upstairs bedrooms."

Shortly after, she thought someone, maybe Goncalves, said "something to the effect of 'there's someone here.' " Kernodle was still awake and using TikTok at 4:12 a.m., according to phone records cited in the affidavit. For this reason, police believe Kernodle could have been the person the roommate living on second floor heard.

The comment caused her to open her bedroom door to look out, but she did not see anyone.

She thought she heard crying from Kernodle's room and a male voice say something to the effect of, "It's OK, I'm going to help you." She opened her bedroom door a second time.

At 4:17 a.m., a neighbor's security camera, located less than 50 feet from Kernodle's bedroom, "picked up distorted audio of what sounded like voices or a whimper followed by a loud thud," and the sound of a dog barking.

Opening her door a third time, she said, she saw a male figure walking toward her dressed in black clothing and a mask that covered his mouth and nose. She didn't recognize him, but estimated him to be at least 5 feet 10 inches, "not very muscular" and "athletically built with bushy eyebrows." She told police that she stood in a "frozen shock phase" as he walked past her and headed toward the sliding glass door to the backyard, according to the affidavit.

She then locked herself in her bedroom, she said.

Investigators later found a shoe print that they say may have been left by the intruder just outside her bedroom door.

Police found the bodies of Kernodle and Chapin in either Kernodle's bedroom or the second-floor bathroom. The affidavit is unclear, simply referring to "the room" where they were found.

"Just before this room there was a bathroom door on the south wall of the hallway," the affidavit stated. "As I approached the room, I could see a body, later identified as Kernodle's, laying on the floor."

The third floor

The third floor of the home includes a bathroom and two bedrooms. One of the bedrooms has a sliding-glass door that opens onto a balcony. Because the balcony doesn't connect to the ground, the only traditional way to reach the third floor is from the staircase on the second floor.

Close friends since childhood, Goncalves and Mogen lived on the third floor — the former's room on the west side and the latter's in the southeast corner, according to the affidavit.

Police found both of their bodies in Mogen's bed.

On the bed next to Mogen's right side, officers also found a tan, leather knife sheath stamped with the inscriptions "Ka-Bar" and "USMC," for the U.S. Marines.

Investigators said they found DNA on the button of the sheath that eventually helped lead to Kohberger's arrest. The sheath DNA was compared to trash recovered from the Kohberger's family's residence in Albrightsville by Pennsylvania agents. [The evidence](#) was sent to the Idaho State Lab, and results came back with a high likelihood — over 99% — that the DNA in the trash belonged to the biological father of the person whose DNA was found on the sheath, according to the affidavit.

	Police found Goncalves' dog, a goldendoodle named Murphy, in Goncalves' room.
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HEADLINE	01/19 Judge: Boeing to face felony charge
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/boeing-ordered-to-be-arraigned-on-charge-in-737-max-crashes/
GIST	<p>DALLAS (AP) — A federal judge has ordered Boeing Co. to be arraigned on a felony charge stemming from crashes of two 737 Max jets, a ruling that threatens to unravel an agreement Boeing negotiated to avoid prosecution.</p> <p>The ruling by a judge in Texas came after relatives of some of the victims said the government violated their rights by reaching a settlement with Boeing without first notifying the families.</p> <p>U.S. District Court Judge Reed O'Connor ordered Boeing to send a representative to his courtroom in Fort Worth Jan. 26 for arraignment.</p> <p>A Boeing spokesman said the company had no comment. The Justice Department, which did not oppose a public arraignment but has fought against re-opening the settlement, also declined to comment.</p> <p>The judge's ruling is a narrow one that does not guarantee Boeing will face prosecution. That, however, remains the goal of lawyers for relatives of some of the 346 people killed in the crashes.</p> <p>One of those lawyers, Paul Cassell, said the Justice Department could stand by the settlement even after the arraignment and a hearing at which passengers' survivors are expected to speak.</p> <p>"But we believe this was such a rotten deal that ... (the Justice Department) can and should, after hearing from the victims, re-do the deal," Cassell said. "They should be prosecuted."</p> <p>The judge has not ruled yet on a separate motion by lawyers for the families to strip Boeing's immunity from prosecution.</p> <p>The families accuse the government of cutting a secret deal with Boeing without telling them about the negotiations.</p> <p>O'Connor ruled last year that the relatives are crime victims under federal law and should have been consulted before the Justice Department agreed to a deal under which Boeing paid \$2.5 billion to avoid prosecution on a criminal count of defrauding federal regulators who approved the 737 Max.</p> <p>Most of the money from the settlement went to airlines that couldn't use their Max jets for nearly two years after the planes were grounded worldwide. Boeing agreed to pay a \$243.6 million fine and create a \$500 million fund to compensate victims' families.</p> <p>The first passenger flight of a Max took place in May 2017. The crashes occurred in October 2018 in Indonesia and less than five months later in Ethiopia.</p> <p>On both planes, an automated flight-control system that Boeing did not initially disclose to airlines and pilots pushed the nose down based on a faulty reading from a single sensor on the fuselage. The Federal Aviation Administration cleared Max jets to resume flying in late 2020 after Boeing redesigned the flight system.</p> <p>The crashes led to congressional investigations that harshly criticized both Boeing and the FAA. Congress made changes in how the FAA will certify planes in the future.</p> <p>The only criminal charges stemming from the Max saga were filed against a former Boeing test pilot, who was accused of deceiving the FAA. A jury in Fort Worth found him not guilty last year.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 ShotSpotter: key human role gunshot tech
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/shotspotter-document-reveals-key-human-role-in-gunshot-tech/
GIST	<p>CHICAGO (AP) — In more than 140 cities across the United States, ShotSpotter’s artificial intelligence algorithm and intricate network of microphones evaluate hundreds of thousands of sounds a year to determine if they are gunfire, generating data now being used in criminal cases nationwide.</p> <p>But a confidential ShotSpotter document obtained by The Associated Press outlines something the company doesn’t always tout about its “precision policing system” — that human employees can quickly overrule and reverse the algorithm’s determinations, and are given broad discretion to decide if a sound is a gunshot, fireworks, thunder or something else.</p> <p>Such reversals happen 10% of the time by a 2021 company account, which experts say could bring subjectivity into increasingly consequential decisions and conflict with one of the reasons AI is used in law-enforcement tools in the first place — to lessen the role of all-too-fallible humans.</p> <p>“I’ve listened to a lot of gunshot recordings — and it is not easy to do,” said Robert Maher, a leading national authority on gunshot detection at Montana State University who reviewed the ShotSpotter document. “Sometimes it is obviously a gunshot. Sometimes it is just a ping, ping, ping. ... and you can convince yourself it is a gunshot.”</p> <p>Marked “WARNING: CONFIDENTIAL,” the 19-page operations document spells out how employees in ShotSpotter’s review centers should listen to recordings and assess the algorithm’s finding of likely gunfire based upon a series of factors that may require judgment calls, including whether the sound has the cadence of gunfire, whether the audio pattern looks like “a sideways Christmas tree” and if there is “100% certainty of gunfire in reviewer’s mind.”</p> <p>ShotSpotter said in a statement to the AP that the human role is a positive check on the algorithm and the “plain-language” document reflects the high standards of accuracy its reviewers must meet.</p> <p>“Our data, based on the review of millions of incidents, proves that human review adds value, accuracy and consistency to a review process that our customers—and many gunshot victims—depend on,” said Tom Chittum, the company’s vice president of analytics and forensic services.</p> <p>Chittum added that the company’s expert witnesses have testified in 250 court cases in 22 states, and that its “97% aggregate accuracy rate for real-time detections across all customers” has been verified by an analytics firm the company commissioned.</p> <p>Another part of the document underscores ShotSpotter’s longstanding emphasis on speed and decisiveness, and its commitment to classify sounds in less than a minute and alert local police and 911 dispatchers so they can send officers to the scene.</p> <p>Titled “Adopting a New York State of Mind,” it refers to New York Police Department’s request of ShotSpotter to avoid posting alerts of sounds as “probable gunfire” — only definitive classifications as gunfire or non-gunfire.</p> <p>“End result: It trains the reviewer to be decisive and accurate in their classification and attempts to remove a doubtful publication,” the document reads.</p> <p>Experts say such guidance under tight time pressure could encourage ShotSpotter reviewers to err in favor of categorizing a sound as a gunshot, even if some evidence for it falls short, potentially boosting the numbers of false positives.</p> <p>“You’re not giving your humans much time,” said Geoffrey Morrison, a voice-recognition scientist based in Britain who specializes in forensics processes. “And when humans are under great pressure, the possibility of mistakes is higher.”</p>

ShotSpotter says it published 291,726 gunfire alerts to clients in 2021. That same year, in comments to AP appended to a previous story, ShotSpotter said more than 90% of the time its human reviewers agreed with the machine classification but the company invested in its team of reviewers “for the 10% of the time where they disagree with the machine.” ShotSpotter did not respond to questions on whether that ratio still holds true.

ShotSpotter’s operations document, which the company argued in court for more than a year was a trade secret, was recently released from a protective order in a Chicago court case in which police and prosecutors used ShotSpotter data as evidence in charging a Chicago grandfather with murder in 2020 for allegedly shooting a man inside his car. Michael Williams spent nearly a year in jail before a judge dismissed the case because of insufficient evidence.

Evidence in Williams’ pretrial hearings showed ShotSpotter’s algorithm initially classified a noise picked up by microphones as a firecracker, making that determination with 98% confidence. But a ShotSpotter reviewer who assessed the sound quickly relabeled it as a gunshot.

The Cook County Public Defender’s Office says the operations document was the only paperwork ShotSpotter sent in response to multiple subpoenas for any guidelines, manuals or other scientific protocols. The publicly traded company has long resisted calls to open its operations to independent scientific scrutiny.

Fremont, California-based ShotSpotter acknowledged to AP it has other “comprehensive training and operational materials” but deems them “confidential and trade secret.”

ShotSpotter installed its first sensors in Redwood City, California, in 1996, and for years relied solely on local 911 dispatchers and police to review each potential gunshot until adding its own human reviewers in 2011.

Paul Greene, a ShotSpotter employee who testifies frequently about the system, explained in a 2013 evidentiary hearing that staff reviewers addressed issues with a system that “has been known from time to time to give false positives” because “it doesn’t have an ear to listen.”

“Classification is the hardest element of the process,” Greene said in the hearing. “Simply because we do not have ... control over the environment in which the shots are fired.”

Greene added that the company likes to hire ex-military and former police officers familiar with firearms, as well as musicians because they “tend to have a more developed ear.” Their training includes listening to hundreds of audio samples of gunfire and even visits to rifle ranges to familiarize themselves with the characteristics of gun blasts.

As cities have weighed the system’s promise against its price tag — which can reach \$95,000 per square mile per year — company employees have explained in detail how its acoustic sensors on utility poles and light posts pick up loud pops, booms or bangs and then filter the sounds through an algorithm that automatically classifies whether they’re gunfire or something else.

But until now, little has been known about the next step: how ShotSpotter’s human reviewers in Washington, D.C., and the San Francisco Bay area decide what is a gunshot versus any other noise, 24 hours a day.

“Listening to the audio downloads are important,” according to the document written by David Valdez, a former police officer and now-retired supervisor of one of ShotSpotter’s review centers. “Sometimes the audio is compelling for gunfire that they may override all other characteristics.”

One part of the decision-making that has changed since the document was written in 2021 is whether reviewers can consider if the algorithm had a “high confidence” the sound was a gunshot. ShotSpotter said

the company stopped showing the algorithm’s confidence rating to reviewers in June 2022 “to prioritize other elements that are more highly correlated to accurate human-trained assessment.”

ShotSpotter CEO Ralph Clark has said that the system’s machine classifications are improved by its “real-world feedback loops from humans.”

However, a recent study found humans tend to overestimate their abilities to identify sounds.

The 2022 study published in the peer-reviewed journal Forensic Science International looked at how well human listeners identified voices compared to voice-recognition tools. It found all the human listeners performed worse than the voice system alone, saying the findings should lead to the elimination of human listeners in court cases whenever possible.

“Would that be the case with ShotSpotter? Would the ShotSpotter system plus the reviewer outperform the system alone?” asked Morrison, who was one of seven researchers who conducted the study.

“I don’t know. But ShotSpotter should do validation to demonstrate that.”

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HEADLINE	01/19 Alec Baldwin charged in movie set shooting
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/19/alec-baldwin-facing-involuntary-manslaughter-charge/
GIST	<p>A New Mexico prosecutor has charged actor Alec Baldwin with involuntary manslaughter in connection with the death of cinematographer Halyna Hutchins during the production of a film in 2021.</p> <p>New Mexico 1st Judicial District Attorney Mary Carmack-Altwies also charged the on-set armorer, Hannah Gutierrez-Reed, with involuntary manslaughter after reviewing an investigation by the Santa Fe County Sheriff’s Office.</p> <p>“After a thorough review of the evidence and the laws of the state of New Mexico, I have determined that there is sufficient evidence to file criminal charges against Alec Baldwin and other members of the ‘Rust’ film crew,” Ms. Carmack-Altwies said. “On my watch, no one is above the law, and everyone deserves justice.”</p> <p>Hutchins died on the “Rust” movie set on Oct. 21, 2021, during rehearsal at a small church on the Bonanza Creek Ranch set.</p> <p>A gun handled by Mr. Baldwin fired during the practice, killing Hutchins and sparking a long-running investigation into how a live round could have made its way on set and got mixed up with dummy rounds.</p> <p>The film’s director, Joel Souza, was also wounded, though no charges were filed in connection with his injury.</p> <p>Mr. Baldwin has maintained it was a tragic accident and that he pulled the hammer back on the gun but did not pull the trigger. He blamed Ms. Gutierrez-Reed, the armorer and props assistant on the set, and assistant director Dave Halls, who handed him the .45 revolver.</p> <p>The actor said he believed the gun was cold, meaning it would be safe.</p> <p>Mr. Halls will accept a misdemeanor charge as part of a guilty plea. The terms include a suspended sentence and six months of probation.</p> <p>Mr. Baldwin is a famous actor known for his performances on the TV show “30 Rock” and movies such as “Glengarry Glen Ross.” He’s also hosted podcasts and classical music programs on the radio.</p> <p>He made frequent appearances on “Saturday Night Live” and lampooned former President Donald Trump with an over-the-top impersonation, leading to a running feud between the men.</p>

Prosecutors said Mr. Baldwin and Ms. Gutierrez-Reed will each be charged with two counts of involuntary manslaughter “in the affirmative,” meaning a jury will not only decide if the defendants are guilty, but also under which definition of involuntary manslaughter they were guilty.

The first charge of involuntary manslaughter requires proof of underlying negligence while the second requires there was more than simple negligence. Both forms are punishable by up to 18 months in jail and a \$5,000 fine.

Yet because a gun was involved in the alleged offense, the second definition of involuntary manslaughter features a “firearm enhancement” that includes a mandatory five years in jail.

“If any one of these three people — Alec Baldwin, Hannah Gutierrez-Reed or David Halls — had done their job, Halyna Hutchins would be alive today. It’s that simple,” said Andrea Reeb, the special prosecutor appointed by Ms. Carmack-Altwies to the case. “The evidence clearly shows a pattern of criminal disregard for safety on the ‘Rust’ film set. In New Mexico, there is no room for film sets that don’t take our state’s commitment to gun safety and public safety seriously.”

The charges will be formally filed before the end of the month, after which the defendants will be summoned for a first appearance in court. Mr. Baldwin and Ms. Gutierrez-Reed can appear virtually or even waive their first appearances.

Mr. Baldwin previously reached an undisclosed settlement with Hutchins’ family, which filed a civil suit over the tragedy.

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HEADLINE	01/20 Rampant shoplifting, organized crime thefts
SOURCE	https://www.foxbusiness.com/retail/businesses-drastic-action-protect-ballooning-shoplifting-organized-crime-thefts
GIST	<p>Retail thefts have ballooned in the last few years, creating a multi-billion problem for retailers and forcing companies to take drastic action to protect from lost profits.</p> <p>Numerous pharmacies, grocery stores and other retailers have shortened store hours or been forced to close permanently as locked-up merchandise becomes commonplace to protect against shoplifters and smash-and-grab thieves.</p> <p>"It has to do with all the shoplifting," a Walgreens clerk told Fox Business last month on why ice cream freezers were secured with chains and locks.</p> <p>Crime has weighed heavily on retailers across the country, costing businesses about \$94.5 billion, the National Retail Federation reported last month. It has affected businesses large and small, with Target reporting a 50% increase in shoplifting incidents last year, accounting for a whopping \$400 million in losses.</p> <p>A new report released by DealAid, which was provided to Fox News Digital, found that more than 80% of retailers across the country have seen an increase in violence associated with theft last year. Some 56% of small retail businesses experienced theft in the last year, and 46% of small businesses had to increase prices due to shoplifting losses, according to the report.</p> <p>Beyond installing more private security measures such as cameras, security guards and team members dedicated to retail loss prevention, some stores are taking more high-tech measures to protect their merchandise.</p>

Home-repair chain Lowe's announced a crackdown on power tool thefts, with a new process that would leave the items virtually unusable after they're stolen. A new initiative called "Project Unlock" will utilize RFID chips and scanners to activate power tools when they are purchased.

If a power tool is stolen and not activated at check-out, it will not turn on.

"Over the last few years, theft – driven largely by organized groups – has risen for the entire retail industry," Lowe's said in a December 2022 video announcing the initiative. "The net result has been locked-down store experiences that penalize customers."

"We think there are better ways to curb theft than locking products down."

Home Depot began a similar initiative last year to protect its power tools.

But for many other retailers, locking merchandise down remains the main response to the crime surge – especially in cities such as Los Angeles, San Francisco and New York.

"Everyone is locking everything up. It's a siege mentality," Joe Budano, CEO of Indyme, told Forbes last year. Indyme is a San Diego-based company that sells security devices such as help buttons that customers hit when they need an employee to retrieve something from a locked cabinet, and according to Budano, business boomed by 40% last year.

Customers at some pharmacies and big-box stores have seen everything from candy to mascara to nasal spray under lock and key in recent months, sparking frustration.

"I always found it difficult to find a staff member to come unlock them," Roger Evans of Arizona told Insider last month about why he stopped shopping at Walgreens and CVS to purchase razors. "The drug stores have been perpetually understaffed."

Though the security helps prevent theft, it risks losing customers due to the added wait time for a store clerk to come and unlock a cabinet or product, critics said. Budano estimated that retailers typically see a 15% to 25% drop in sales over customers refusing to purchase a locked-up item, opting to buy online or at a different store instead.

Some smaller stores that sell high-end merchandise, such as jewelry, have moved to operate on an appointment-only basis.

In New York City earlier this month, a jewelry store was targeted by masked smash-and-grab thieves who stole up to \$2 million in gems in less than one minute.

The Brooklyn jewelry store will now operate on an appointment-only basis until it installs more security measures. It's a tactic Madison Avenue shops on the Upper East Side used last year to combat daytime shoplifters, the New York Post reported in April.

Small business owners who don't have the funds of a national chain are getting even more creative to protect their inventory.

A Houston, Texas, bar owner told Fox News' "Fox & Friends" this month that he's been sleeping in his restaurant to protect against burglaries.

"This is a major issue with our city right now," Cobo's BBQ owner Raul Jacobo told co-host Carley Shimkus. "If I'm frustrated ... based on these burglaries, I could just imagine how families feel that they've actually lost loved ones because certain criminals are put back out on the street."

"It's just a very frustrating situation ... all around ... we have no choice but to sleep in our establishments just to protect what's ours," he added.

	<p>In Philadelphia, a gas station owner hired private security guards who wear Kevlar vests and are armed with AR-15s or shotguns to protect the establishment.</p> <p>Last year, San Francisco police staked out popular retailers such as Walgreens, Old Navy, Target, Whole Foods, CVS and Macy's to catch shoplifters and other retail thieves.</p> <p>Shoplifting and organized retail theft are likely not about to disappear from stores this year, experts said.</p> <p>The study published by DealAid shows that organized retail crime increased by 26.5% last year, but the vast majority of retailers, at about 68%, don't have departments dedicated to preventing organized retail crimes, such as smash-and-grabs.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 US: key 'disappearance' suspect to Mexico
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/us-hands-mexico-suspect-missing-students-case-96539619
GIST	<p>MEXICO CITY -- U.S. authorities handed over a key suspect in the 2014 disappearance of 43 college students to Mexico, after the man was caught trying to cross the border Dec. 20 without proper documents.</p> <p>Mexico's National Immigration Institute identified the man only by his first name, but a federal agent later confirmed Thursday that he is Alejandro Tenescalco. The institute said he failed to qualify for asylum in the United States.</p> <p>Tenescalco was a police supervisor in the city of Iguala, where the students from a rural teachers college were abducted by municipal police. Investigations suggest corrupt police turned the students over to a drug gang, who killed them and burned their bodies.</p> <p>Alejandro Encinas, the head of the government Truth Commission, has called Tenescalco "one of the main perpetrators" of the crime.</p> <p>He faces charges of kidnapping and organized crime. The Mexican government had offered a \$500,000 reward for his arrest.</p> <p>In 2022, the Truth Commission declared the disappearances a "state crime," because authorities at all levels of government were involved in the disappearances and cover-up.</p> <p>The investigations resulted in the arrests of three soldiers, including a now retired general who had been the army commander in the area when the abductions occurred. Also, then federal Attorney General Jesús Murillo Karam has been accused of inventing the government's original account based on torture and manipulation of evidence.</p> <p>But some charges against dozens of other suspects have been tossed out because of tainted evidence.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 Indiana police kill shooter in Walmart
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/indiana-police-kill-shooter-walmart-1-person-injured-96556469
GIST	<p>EVANSVILLE, Ind. -- A gunman shot at police as he weaved through the aisles of an Indiana Walmart before officers shot and killed him late Thursday, authorities said.</p> <p>The gunman, who was not immediately identified, wounded at least one other person in the store, Evansville Police Department Sgt. Anna Gray told WFIE-TV. The victim was transported to an area hospital and the severity of their injuries was not immediately known. No officers were wounded, she said.</p> <p>Evansville police and Vanderburgh County sheriff's deputies responded to a report of an active shooter in the store at around 10 p.m.</p>

“When officers went in, they were trying to locate the suspect and he was all over the store. He would shoot at officers and move. So it wasn’t contained to just one area inside,” Gray said.

Multiple law enforcement members returned fire during the encounter and the gunman was killed, Gray said.

“At this time we don’t know how many other people he shot at,” Gray said, adding that there could be additional victims who fled.

Authorities asked anyone who left the scene with injuries, no matter how small, to contact emergency medical services, WFIE reported.

A Walmart representative did not immediately respond to an email from The Associated Press seeking additional information.

Further details would be provided from the scene at 5 a.m. Friday with a press conference later in the day, the city’s police department said in a tweet.

Evansville, a city of around 116,000 residents on the Ohio River, is located 172 miles (276 kilometers) southwest of Indianapolis.

A Walmart manager in Chesapeake, Virginia, killed six people when he began shooting wildly inside a break room before a routine employee meeting last November, two days ahead of the Thanksgiving holiday. Six people were also wounded. The gunman shot and killed himself before officers arrived.

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HEADLINE	01/19 Kia, Hyundai car thefts rise in TikTok trend
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2023/01/19/usb-hotwire-kia-hyundai-tiktok/
GIST	<p>Local police are warning car owners of a TikTok challenge that is inspiring car thieves to target Hyundai and Kia vehicles by exploiting a manufacturing defect that allows them to easily be hot-wired with a USB phone charger cord.</p> <p>The trend, amplified in instructional videos on the social media platform TikTok, is not new, but law enforcement officials say they are seeing an uptick in thefts.</p> <p>In Prince George’s County in Maryland, a suburb of Washington, D.C., that has seen a spike in vehicle thefts since the onset of the pandemic, police said thefts of Kia and Hyundai vehicles have accounted for nearly one-sixth of all thefts in 2022 and nearly half of all thefts so far in 2023.</p> <p>Prince George’s County Police Department detectives on the Washington Area Vehicle Enforcement (WAVE) team arrested a 17-year-old this month who police said was driving a stolen Kia Optima. The department said detectives found a USB charging cord on the driver’s-side floorboard that they believe was used to start the stolen car.</p> <p>The TikTok trend and wave of stolen vehicles that has followed has sparked such a backlash, including dozens of lawsuits, that both Hyundai and Kia have announced plans to address the security defect and remedy the vulnerability for the vehicle owners. In one class-action lawsuit filed in California, the complaint against the companies asserts that “Kia and Hyundai’s vehicles are so easy to steal, teenagers and children as young as 11 years old are stealing and joyriding cars, and posting their exploits on social media, including one TikTok video that has over 33 million views.”</p> <p>Police departments nationwide have been raising alarms over the thefts. In August, law enforcement officials in Los Angeles issued an alert on the trend, saying it is “growing in popularity and police departments across the nation are experiencing this as well.” Chicago police issued a similar advisory the same month, reporting an “astounding” increase in vehicle thefts because of the TikTok challenge.</p>

The TikTok videos show how inserting a USB cable into the steering column of some makes of Kia and Hyundai vehicles allows people to start the cars without a key, in part because the vehicles lack immobilizing technology.

In response to the “increasing thefts targeting our vehicles without push-button ignitions and immobilizing anti-theft devices,” Hyundai made engine immobilizers standard for all vehicles manufactured since November 2021, a company spokesperson said in a statement. Hyundai also plans to make a software update available beginning in March, free of cost, the spokesperson said.

In a separate statement, Kia said it is concerned about the “trend among youth in some areas” to target its cars that have a steel key and traditional ignition system and said it will have a similar security software update available “in the near future.” All 2022 models have immobilizer technology, the company said.

Both manufacturers are working with select local law enforcement agencies, including the Prince George’s County Police Department, to provide steering wheel locks to Kia and Hyundai owners affected by the issue.

Prince George’s police said Kia and Hyundai owners should consider purchasing a brake pedal club, alarm or other theft-prevention device to protect their vehicles from the TikTok trend.

“We encourage residents to remove charger cords from their vehicles or at least hide them,” the department said in a statement.

Prince George’s County police said 617 Hyundai and Kia vehicles were stolen in 2022. Already in 2023, at least 108 have been stolen, nearly 18 percent of the total from the prior year.

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